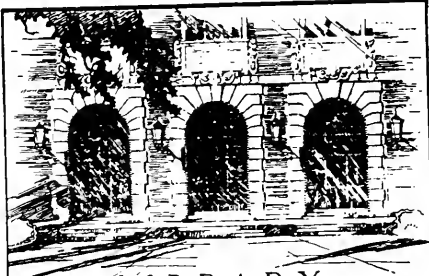


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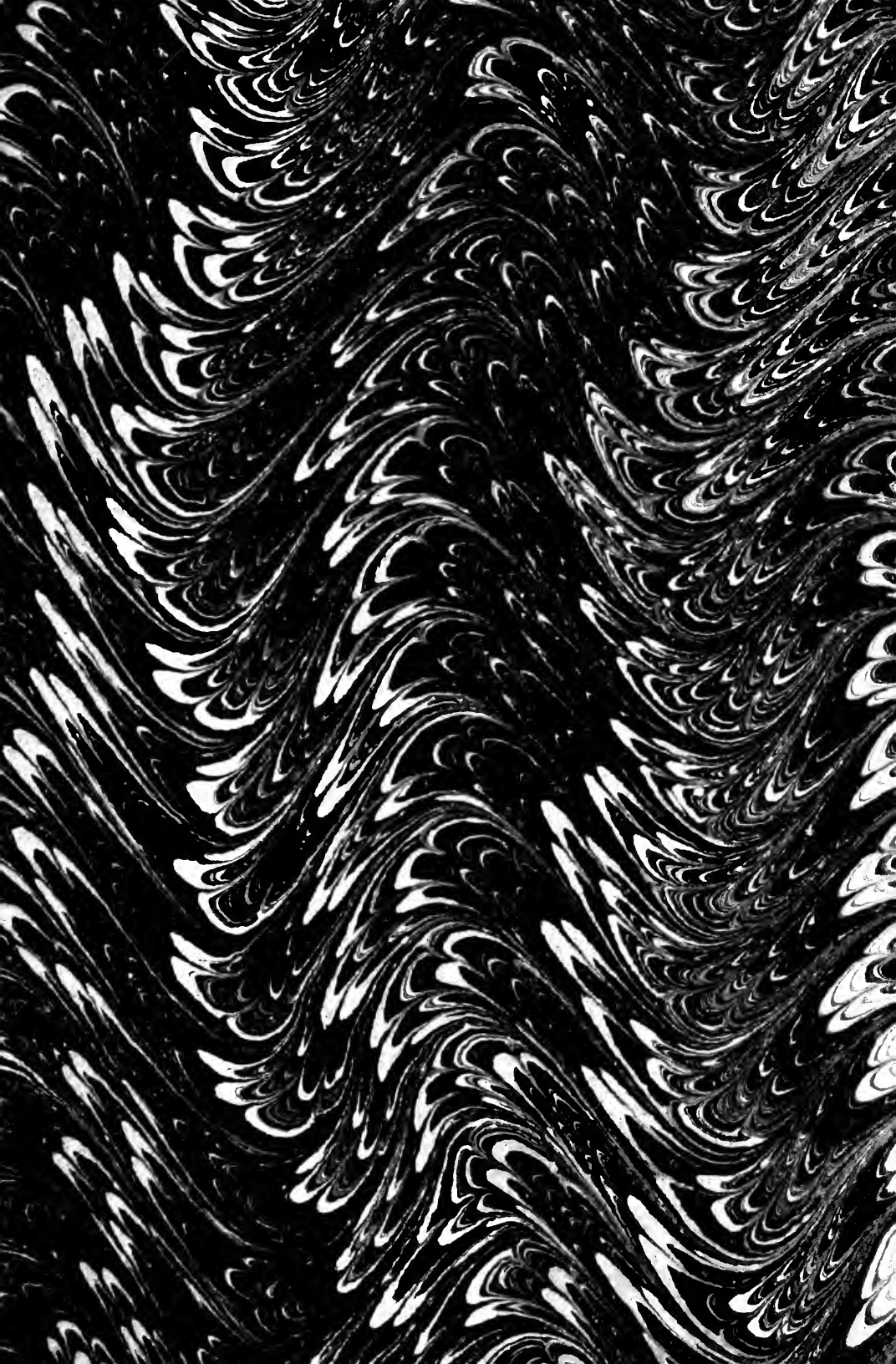


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COUSIN AND BRIDE.

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VOL. I.

IVY:

COUSIN AND BRIDE.

BY

PERCY GREG

AUTHOR OF

“ACROSS THE ZODIAC,” “ERRANT,”

&c., &c.

“For Love himself took part against himself.”

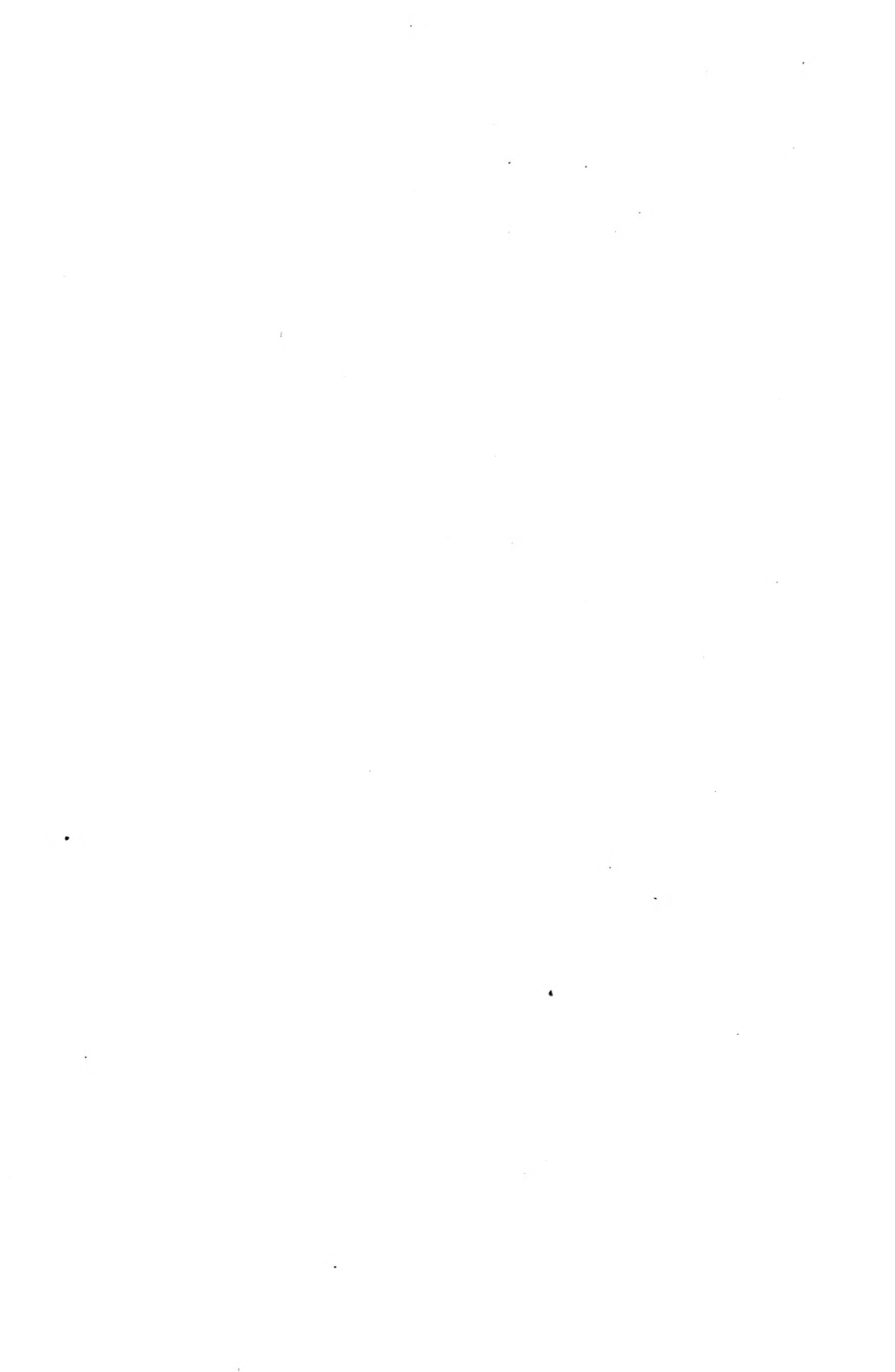
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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General Ray 21 May 57 F. Edwards = 30 15 July 60 Ashmore

I V Y.



CHAPTER I.

FERNDALE HOLM.

“**L**ESTRANGE!” I exclaimed. “Surely, Cleveland, that is a curious selection?”

I was spending a brief holiday at Ferndale Holm, partly to discuss with its master the arrangements of a London daily journal recently purchased by an association of Tory capitalists, of whom Cleveland was in importance and personal influence, though by no means in pecuniary interest one of the principal.

“I think, on the whole,” he rejoined, “it is the best I can make. My colleagues have very wisely decided to leave the choice exclusively in a single hand, instead of attempting an election

by vote; and after carefully considering all his qualifications and all the objections you have in view, I can fix on no better man. V—— will not take it: you could not; and Leaf, perhaps in other respects the best qualified of all, has not the capacity of dealing with men that the position requires. You could not find a better Editor if he had to deal only with writings, and not with writers."

"And yet," I said, "Leaf is generally liked, I think, and certainly made no enemies when he held a quasi-editorial post on the *Trumpet*."

"No," said Cleveland; "but he cooled everybody a little. He made a certain amount of needless friction; and you must remember that the ultimate control remained in the hands of ——, who, though far inferior to Leaf in knowledge and in intellect, was perhaps the most conciliatory and kindly man that within my memory has filled such a post. Yet you know that there was not under their joint rule that kind of active, hearty co-operation that there had been in former days. You will have Leaf for a colleague. He takes what in his hands will be the second place, the Foreign Editorship; and I look to him to make

the *Courier* in a few years the highest authority upon Continental politics."

"I hoped," said I, "that you were to have been our chief."

"Did you? I thought you knew me better. Nothing that English life has to offer would induce me to live in London. I have twice refused to contest a parliamentary constituency, the last time with something more than a fair chance of success. And, despite my twelve years' experience of journalism, I hardly think I could endure the toil of editorship—the hurry, worry, and fatigue, the constant excitement, the inevitable exaggeration of trifles, and the poverty of the result."

"A successful newspaper is a great power, and gives its Editor a great position."

"True; but the man himself must be damaged, and his work must be inferior. He has not time to think clearly or to write—or even to direct his staff—carefully and wisely. He must live in the midst of a perpetual 'tempest in a teapot;' his judgments are inevitably half-considered, and his information one-sided. I like to be sure what I *do* think before I speak; you, I know, care more

to have an opinion than to be sure of its soundness. You are pugnacious by instinct, and, so you are fighting under the old colours, never care to examine your ground—I mean as a journalist. It is true that my colleagues offered me the place almost on my own terms. But I don't know that I could have done the work better than Lestrangle; and I was astonished that anyone should have asked me to give up a life thoroughly congenial to me for money, which after all I don't want. But why do you object so strongly to Lestrangle?"

"I should be sorry to object now I know he is to be my chief. *I* can get on with him, especially in the department you have assigned to me. But I should have thought him less likely to win your approval than my own."

"You and he have too much in common to appreciate each other thoroughly. I am in no danger of exaggerating his defects, because I can't imagine myself ever led astray by them; and can measure his character truly, because my sympathy with him is purely intellectual. I grant you that he writes more bitterly, stings more deeply and lastingly, than any other writer of our day; but

that is in virtue of his force and keenness, rather than his venom. There are abundance of reptiles who, with poison bags ten times bigger, never get the credit of ill-nature, because their fangs are blunt and their jaws impotent. I know he often frightened your late chief; but I have no fear of his violence when he is in command. He has one or two very rare faculties. First, he knows himself, and is, I think, a little too distrustful of his own judgment. His critical instinct is quite impersonal; he judges his own work as equitably as another's, and may be trusted to overrule his own crotchets and curb his own humours as strictly as yours or Everett's; though, when another held the bridle, he was simply as bitter as he knew how to be, trusting Leaf to moderate any excess of vitriol. And, remember, bitter as he is, irritable as is his temper, he never made a personal enemy—has not, I believe, a personal enemy in his own profession, or indeed outside his own family. A family quarrel so sharp as his may argue, generally does indicate, want of temper or judgment; but such quarrels may be forced on anyone, and outsiders can only judge by the character of the men. Lestranger's

stands far higher than that of any of those with whom he has quarrelled. He is reputed by all who have known and dealt with him a man of stainless chivalric loyalty and honour. His enemies certainly are not. Till lately most of those who have worked with him or under him have been his warm personal friends. Perhaps his most remarkable and exceptional peculiarity is his readiness to do full and generous justice to the work of others. Most of us have a chance in life; his was a splendid one, came when he was not twenty-five, and he missed it by twelve hours. He would have been where Ferrol is, or higher. Well, we were talking of Ferrol the other day, and Lestrangle said, in his quiet matter-of-fact way, 'I never saw but one instance of what people call special providence; when he stepped over my head. We should never have known it, but we should have lost the best journalist in Europe.' That temper is about the highest qualification an Editor could have. I see you smile. It is rare; but it is the one quality which induces subalterns to work like chiefs; and I have known that quality, by getting the best out of the best men, make a successful Editor

without critical tact, political knowledge, intellectual force, or even industry."

"Well," I said, "if Lestrangle can keep his temper with his staff, and will not write, or will get some one else to look over his own articles, I can conceive that he might five years ago have been fit for the place. But surely his health is too utterly broken to endure long the work from which you yourself seem to flinch?"

"Very likely. He may be quite right in saying that he will not live five years; but in that time he will have made the *Courier*; and the question concerns him rather than his friends. He is willing, for the sake of a wife and children he will never see again, to seize a chance of making a fortune, or at least a competence, in the few years left to him. But he has misgivings on that score, not for himself, but for the paper; and he has made a condition not very easy to fulfil. I must find him 'a right hand, or rather a body;' a man who can, under his direction, do all the physical and mechanical work, from taking down articles and confidential letters in shorthand to answering ordinary correspondence, correcting proofs, revising editorial copy, attending in the

Gallery and the Lobby ; in short, an amanuensis, private secretary and deputy-editor in one. Lestrangle can always think and speak clearly—thanks to opium—but very often he can neither walk nor write for weeks at a time. His *alter ego* must have the ability, if not the experience, of a special correspondent or a secondary leader-writer ; must be capable of actually editing the *Courier* for a day or two, at need ; and yet he must be content with absolute subordination—content to be no more than a secretary, and in that capacity to be absolutely, generously loyal to his chief ; to do his utmost to postpone his own inevitable succession.”

“ A white crow, if not a Phœnix.”

“ A black swan, perhaps,” said Cleveland, laughing. “ But Australia is almost next door now-a-days ; and you may see my black swan or white crow nearer than the Zoological Gardens. You will be yet more incredulous when you hear his name. Do you know Ethert Glynne ?”

“ Not personally,” I replied. “ As a reviewer, I have read, I believe, all his writings, and should certainly have thought him too ambitious to accept such a post.”

“Clever as they are,” said Cleveland. “Glynne’s books have scarcely paid. Certainly he could not live by them. For some reason which I may guess, but am not at liberty to guess aloud, he wishes to make within the next three years a secure position, social and pecuniary; and of course Lestrangle proposes to pay well for such peculiar service. Glynne is scarcely thirty, and his experience in journalism has been limited. If he married he must give up the fellowship on which he has hitherto depended. His two years’ experience in the Gallery has given him a facility in shorthand writing which will be most serviceable, and if, as I think he will, he accepts the post, he is a man who will be thoroughly, earnestly loyal; a man who, with his own eccentric temper and somewhat mystical ideas, is not unlikely to feel a strong personal sympathy for Lestrangle. I am going to see him to-day: will you walk with me?”

Our walk, along hills that overlooked two of the loveliest of English lakes, was a pleasant, though it threatened to be a somewhat fatiguing one. Ethert Glynne was now staying at his

mother's cottage, some ten miles from Ferndale Holm. In consideration for myself, not practised as he was in the daily exercise of a mountaineer, Cleveland proposed to return by boat from Thornhurst, a village with a landing-place on the lake, nearly a mile from Mrs. Glynne's home. But about half-way, at the junction of two mountain roads, we encountered a little party, all of whom evidently recognized my companion. The eldest of the three—whom by Cleveland's "There he is!" I judged to be the object of our quest, was a man of middle height; of form somewhat slight and spare, but erect and well made, indicating in step and bearing the vigour produced and sustained by constant exercise in the open air; of countenance in nowise remarkable, though at a second glance the capacious skull and ample forehead were suggestive of more than average intelligence—a suggestion very often deceptive. Only the eyes attracted especial notice from an observer stimulated to careful examination by such an acquaintance with the man's achievements in my own field as I possessed. Unusually dark in colour, clear, and of exceptional brightness—a brightness which seemed to arrest your

scrutiny at their outer surface—their large orbs fixed at once on the countenance of him who addressed Ethert Glynne, or to whom the latter spoke, seeming at first to look you through and through; then, so speedily as to give the sense of interruption long before his scrutiny was finished, that intent purpose faded out of them; and you were conscious that they were occupied, not with you, but with something far beyond—some scene very remote in time, place, or imagination; until perchance his interest was recalled by some passage in the conversation that touched his sympathies or provoked his antagonism.

One of his companions was a lad of eighteen; a sixth-form boy from some public school, I guessed, by a certain self-respect that hardly belongs to a boy of that age who has lagged behind; bright and intelligent, but probably more renowned in the eleven than in the classroom; more interested in the athletics of which he might be an ornament, than in the books he would be ashamed to neglect; tall, vigorous, active, but somewhat loosely built, and, as soldiers say, ill set-up. A physiologist would

have said that, if his parents were sound in mind and body, there was yet some constitutional defect not worked out of the lineage. There was a distant family resemblance between the pair.

The third member of the group had no likeness to either. A young girl—so young that the earnest courtesy of Cleveland's greeting to her, and the formality with which he introduced to "Miss Mordaunt" a man much more than old enough to be her father, seemed a little incongruous. Her dress and manner, till the latter grew dignified as he turned to her, bespoke her still a child—certainly in the schoolroom, and likely to remain there for some years her figure and features had the look of incompleteness, imperfection characteristic of her actual age, had lost the grace and beauty of childhood without having as yet attained anything of the regular form and rounded delicacy of dawning womanhood. Yet, ere our brief converse ended, I ceased to be surprised at Cleveland's manifest interest in her. Undeveloped in actual shape, her countenance, in its outlines and evident character, gave promise of a rare and very impressive beauty—of a very uncommon

union of regular, almost faultless form with life and mobility of expression.

Even now, when the eye had lost the sense of that "unfinished" condition which belonged to a stage of growth through which even the most absolute feminine beauty must pass, the face was more than pretty, and was deeply interesting. Perhaps a principal cause of the feeling of incongruity it had inspired at first sight was that which would one day be its especial and distinctive beauty; the unusual combination of colour; a fair complexion and brilliant colour, with long loose abundant locks of tawny gold—even at her age most girls would have done more justice to such an ornament—and eyes of a deep clear brown, with dark brows and long dark lashes. The broad expanse of the forehead was perhaps too ample, the head a thought too large, as the form wanted stature to suit its proportions perfectly; but such defects two or three years might well correct, and would certainly compensate. The small rosy mouth had not quite relaxed from a distinctly petulant expression; there was more of thought, and even of moodiness, than of maidenly sweetness or childish

softness in the entire meaning of the face and attitude; and I had observed that she walked on the side farthest from Ethert, though she had not seemed to be attending to her younger companion. She *could* be out of humour, evidently; apparently, too, she hardly appreciated the attention of a man like Glynne to one not yet entitled to expect such attention in right of sex, though she was visibly gratified by the notice and flattered by the courtesy of a comparative stranger like Cleveland.

A few words from the latter relieved the boyish awkwardness of Charlie Glynne, who was reading during the long vacation with his elder cousin, preparatory to matriculation at Oxford. Ethert and I shook hands not more cordially and sincerely, but perhaps more unconstrainedly, than we might have done had Glynne known which of the reviews he had no doubt read and re-read with intense attention were due to my pen; or had I not been perfectly assured of his ignorance.

"I was coming to call on you, Glynne," said Cleveland. "I wanted to talk business with you. I have heard of something that may or may not

meet the views you mentioned the other day. Can you turn back with us? My friend would be glad to escape a prolongation of our walk."

"Charlie," said Glynn, turning to his cousin, "will you take Margaret home?—at once, please; and ask my mother not to wait for me, I cannot tell when I shall return."

There was a very slight emphasis on the instruction given to the youth, as if his heedlessness or the young lady's wilfulness might require a special warning; and then parting from them, we turned to walk back to Ferndale Holm.

Cleveland explained carefully and distinctly the nature, especially dwelling on the drawbacks and disadvantages, of the proposed situation. It was a maxim of his that the worst side of an offer should always be pressed on a man, the best on a woman, if you wished that it should be willingly accepted and contentedly retained. Glynne accepted at once, but by no means enthusiastically, remarking only that the position would afford an exceptionally complete professional training and experience.

Then they passed on to discuss its duties and demands in detail; and I was struck to observe

how well versed was Cleveland—like myself, a writer only, and unlike myself, a writer unfamiliar with the mere technical task-work of leader-writing—in the entire theory and practice of journalism. The truth is, he has known *men*, and learned from them whatever books could not and experience did not chance to teach him. Equally notable was his insight into the personality of the two men for whom he was preparing so intimate a relation.

So conversing we reached Ferndale Holm. Its young mistress received the new-comer with something different from, I cannot say more than, the kindly cordial welcome she ever gave to her husband's friends. I could see that either Ethert was a personal favourite of hers, or something in his works, his character, or his situation had attracted her especial interest and sympathy. Despite her invitation, however, Glynne refused to remain for Cleveland's usual dinner hour, which was always late enough, except in the very middle of summer, to allow us to enjoy the last rays of sunlight, to remain out of doors as long as the air was pleasant; and Mrs. Cleveland left us to add some more solid refreshment to the after-

noon tea, which she presently brought us with her own hands as we lay on the lawn. I noticed too when Ethert left, that he carried in his button-hole one of the last rosebuds of the season, from a tree which none but herself was allowed to touch, an especial *protégé* and favourite of her own.

In her absence we had fallen into talk about a recent work of my own, whose failure to obtain popularity had been a greater mortification than with my experience any such incident should have been.

“I shall never,” I said, “do anything better.”

“Probably not,” replied Cleveland, “for there I recognised not the intentional creation of a month or a year, but the embodied realization of day-dreams, fancies, hopes, and alarms, garnered and talked over for half a lifetime. That harvest of course cannot be reaped twice, and it is that long unconscious incubation which has given the fulness recognised by most of your critics to a book completed from first to last, you told me, in six months. It was daring, too; especially your half-length picture of a polygamic home.”

“That,” said Glynne, “seemed to me the most startling of all the thousand impossibilities of a story not intended to be possible.”

“And why?” enquired Cleveland. “I suppose most men would be polygamists if they had the courage? And we know that women do contrive to endure it.”

“That was not my objection,” the other replied. “I can manage to understand the distribution of masculine love; and still more easily the secondary love given in that case to one or two ladies less angelic and more earth-like than the favourite. What seems false to nature is the relation of the Adventurer to wives he despised and disliked, yet who are sorry to part with him.”

“You think they must have found him out?”

“I don’t know that that would so much matter. But I can conceive nothing but misery from first to last in a union devoid of conjugal love; nothing more loathsome than the position of the man, except that of the woman.”

“And yet,” said Cleveland, “we know that marriages of interest, of convenience, are some-

times made; and, according to some cynical moralists—our friend Lestrangle has often argued the point with me—are not more unhappy in the long run than most marriages for love. And there, Glynne, is, I think, a fault in your last work. The marriage of interest had everything to recommend it—ambition, need, the hero's taste for wealth and dread of poverty. The lady was not by any means unattractive; and yet one never feels he is tempted for a moment, or wavers even unconsciously."

"Simply," replied Glynne, "that I cannot understand the temptation. What satisfaction to a man's pride, ambition, love of power, fame, or luxury, could compensate, could render enduring, the necessity of maintaining—I might say, could render it possible to maintain—the most intimate relations with a woman he could never love, however coldly?"

"And yet," observed Cleveland, "we know that half the marriages of European society, and perhaps most of those of Asia, are marriages of convenience; and if not happy they are not found intolerable."

"That," said Glynne, thoughtfully, "is for

me one of the standing puzzles of life. I suppose each of us could specify things which he knows, but can't believe ; and the satisfaction found in a mercenary marriage is to me the chief of incredible certainties. The phrase which compares such marriages with the worst form of lawless sensuality seems to me a literal truth, and both are as unintelligible as all other ' sins against nature.' "

"Can you not understand, then," I asked, "one of the most familiar phenomena of domestic life ; the love that survives respect or esteem, that sometimes seems to have dispensed with them from the first ?"

"Yes," returned Ethert, after a minute's consideration. "But love has always seemed to me one of those many distinctions between man and the brutes which testify most powerfully to a spiritual element in humanity, wanting or but very slightly developed in the lower creation. Between their passion and ours I recognize not analogy but contrast. With birds and beasts that do pair I suppose the choice of mates is little more than an accident, and a lost one is easily and completely replaced. To man, unless brutalized,

the one woman is not dear for her womanhood so much as womanhood sacred, interesting, attractive only for or through its reflection of the one woman we love. Is it not a spiritual affection that incarnates itself in the instinct, rather than the instinct that is elevated and purified by a supervening spiritual relation?"

"Ideally, perhaps, it should be so," rejoined Cleveland, seeming to suppress an ironical smile. "Practically, it *is* exactly the reverse, save in one case out of ten thousand."

Mrs. Cleveland's approach terminated an argument to me barely comprehensible. We walked again a short way homeward with Glynne, and as we returned Cleveland observed, in a reflective tone :

"Now I begin to understand that man's poetry, where it has always seemed to me artificial. It is not, as I thought, that he depicts untruthfully a common sentiment, but depicts truthfully one so uncommon that few of us can understand it; and I think there is a part of Lestrangle's nature with which Glynne will be in very deep accord. You remember 'Procyon's' saying, 'There is in one current word of this refined age a coarseness

that surpasses the worst impurities of Martial or Rabelais—that is to these what the Poses Plastiques were to the nudity of Olympus. A generation that calls women “females” has forgotten the instinct of human decency. Who could hear his mother or daughter so defined? It is the phrase of men who have lost the ideal of womanhood, and of women who never had it? He and Glynne must have much in common.”

I can't say that I understood him; some of my readers possibly may.

CHAPTER II.

A WAYWARD WARD.

“STOP, Charlie,” said the young girl, as they passed a small inn upon the lake’s side, where two or three light rowing-boats were drawn up on the beach, “let us go home by the lake; you can row, and I like it far better than walking.”

The lad hesitated.

“I am afraid it won’t do, Meta. Ethert told me to take you straight home; and that is not all. Though he has not told me never to take you out on the lake, I am sure he would not like it, especially after what he said overnight.”

“I don’t care,” Meta answered, petulantly. “If he chose to forbid it in so many words, I suppose I must obey; at any rate, Mrs. Glynne would be very angry with me if I did not. But I don’t see that, except for what she might say,

I am bound to obey his wishes, when they are not commands."

"I am, at any rate," said her companion, gravely. "I am very sorry to disoblige you, Meta, but I cannot abuse Ethert's trust; nor, where you are concerned, can I do what I know he would not like."

"It is all nonsense!" she exclaimed, angrily. "He is out of humour with me, or means to pay me out, because of what happened last evening. He had told me to hold the sheet, but I didn't care to be bothered by it, and fastened it. Then there came a squall, and he found out what I had done. He cut it loose with his knife, and rated me like a naughty child. Three years ago—but that Ethert never did get me into trouble at home—I should have made sure of being whipped and sent to bed."

"And serve you right," cried Charlie. "If my fag did such a thing, wouldn't I lick him! I gave you credit for more knowledge of the lake, Meta. Don't you know it is worse in that way than the sea? The squalls come down these mountain gullies and strike the lake often half-a-mile from the shore, so that they may catch you before you

are warned, even if you happen to be looking to windward, by their ruffling the surface. Ethert might well scold; you must have had a narrow escape from drowning."

"Nonsense!" the girl answered, though for a moment a little startled by her companion's emphatic denunciation. "I can swim, and Ethert knows it, for he taught me."

"Yes; how were you dressed then? Nay, don't be vexed; but Ivy asked him, for she would have liked to learn. I mean, it was one thing to swim in that light serge, fitting close from neck to knees, and leaving every limb quite free, and a very different one indeed with your everyday clothes clinging round you. When those skirts were once drenched, you might as well attempt to swim in irons. Ethert himself couldn't swim a hundred yards in them."

"I don't care; I had as soon be drowned once for all as forbidden to go out for the chance of it. But he knows I should be safe when you had no sail, and only the oars. It is only done to punish me."

She gave way, however, and they walked on without more words for a while; the lad evidently

meditating something in silence which perhaps he was afraid or hardly knew how to say.

“Meta,” he began at last, “I don’t want to offend or quarrel with you—but I am not like Ethert; you can scold, or cry, as you please, and it will not break my heart. We have been friends since I was a fourth-form lad, and you a child of ten; and you must know that nothing you say, whether against me or anyone else, will make me like you the less; but I think I ought to tell you what nobody else will. I know you, and I know how much you mean; other people don’t; and any one who heard you speak of Ethert, or even of my aunt, as you speak to me—and I fear you sometimes say the same kind of thing to strangers—would think very ill of you indeed.”

“I don’t care, and I don’t see it,” she answered. “Of course I must not speak ill of one who stands in place of a mother to me; but I don’t see that Ethert has any right to control me, or that if he scolds me as he did, and speaks of me as he must have done to you, I should not say what I think of it.”

Her companion looked in downright amaze-

ment into the girl's face. Young as he was, he had sense to see that she spoke with more good faith than he at first thought possible; not in the mere childish sullenness which refuses to recognise in words obligations of which the speaker cannot but be secretly conscious, not in the sheer shameless ingratitude so common to her sex. On the other hand the evident surprise she saw in his look startled her into reflection.

"No," she said, after a minute's pause. "I don't see; unless it be that he is Mrs. Glynné's son. And she is always angering me by speaking as you do, as if I ought to think even more of Ethert's wishes than of hers. After all, she is not my mother, and he is nothing to me."

"Do you know what you are saying, Meta? It is not only for being born that children owe respect and gratitude to their parents. Ethert says the first and more obvious duty rests on those who have brought them into the world. But when they have done their best for us, you would be shocked to hear Ivy, or me, speak slightly of our mother or father. Yet they have only cared for their own. How much more, deeper, is your debt to those who have done as

much, in their own way, for one who did not belong to them—had no claim on them? And as for Ethert, he is so good a fellow, he has been so kind to me, that I could not bear to hear anyone speak of him in that tone without getting angry. But from you, Meta, it is too bad; you cannot mean what you say. You must know that all a girl could well owe to a man, you owe to Ethert.”

Her face grew grave at once, but also calm; the angry light fading from the eyes as much of the colour faded from her bright cheeks.

“What do you mean?”

“Mean?” He checked himself suddenly. “If it is news to you, I suppose I ought never to have said it; if you don’t know, it must be because Ethert has taken pains you never should.”

“Tell me,” she said. “You have said too much already to be silent now. If you will not tell me,” as he remained silent and perplexed, “I can only ask Mrs. Glynn, and I am sure it will make her very angry.”

“I don’t think,” he replied, with much hesitation, “that I have any right to tell you what it

is clear that neither Ethert nor my Aunt intended that you should know."

"How do you know it then? If Ethert told you, and did not tell you not to tell me, you have a right to speak."

"I don't know that I should; but Ethert told me nothing, nor my Aunt either, only I seem always to have known all about it. And you are quite wrong, Meta," he added, trying to turn the conversation, "in thinking that Ethert said anything unkind, spoke as if blaming you in the least, last night. I did not know that anything unpleasant or awkward had happened; but he said something about the dangers of the lake, and that if I would go out alone I must never take the responsibility of any one else's safety."

"Never mind: if what you have said just now is true—I beg your pardon, I mean if you are not mistaken—Ethert had a right to say what he pleased, and I have no right to resent it."

"You may be very sure you have not, Meta. Do you not know, do you not see every day, how differently Ethert behaves to you than to any other child?—Oh, I am not to call you a child? very well—to any other young lady?"

“What do you mean? Does he not speak to me and treat me just as he does your sister?”

“Ivy is his cousin; and Ivy is three years older than you, which makes a great difference just now, whatever it may do three years hence. No, he is very fond of Ivy, makes very much of her, and I don’t suppose he would hurt her for the world. I never saw him so disturbed as when something he said and she misunderstood set her off crying. But he don’t pick and choose his words with her, and—well, he does treat her like a child, and you—like the Princess of a fairy-tale. With other young ladies he gives himself rather less trouble than most men do; not that he is not polite, but he does not care a twopenny—straw whether they like it or not.”

“Nor whether they like him, either?”

“Perhaps,” answered Charlie. “And so, Meta, you may judge how much he cares either that you should like him, or, it may be, that he should give you no cause to do otherwise.”

“Then,” observed Margaret reflectively, “if he felt that, why should he keep back what must oblige me to like him, and more than like him, however he might treat me?”

“I am sure you can answer that question yourself, if you will think a little. No man would like to remind a girl how much she owes to him ; no generous person, man or woman—nay you yourself, I was going to say again, child as you are—you would not care to enforce anyone’s affection by letting them know that you had done for them more than they could ever hope to repay. The more they owed you, the more you would wish to win their affection, if you cared for it, independently of that.”

“I understand,” she replied, after a moment’s consideration ; “and that is just like Ethert. Whatever he has done for me—and he has often taken great trouble to give me pleasure—he never likes to have much said about it. He would rather see that I am pleased, or get ‘thank you’ and a kiss in earnest—” she stopped, colouring with the consciousness natural to her character and feelings, half childish, half womanly. “Charlie, you must tell me ! You have said all, you have made me understand whatever Ethert did not wish me to find out. Now it is only fair to tell me the exact truth, and let me perceive how I ought to feel and behave. If, as you say, people

think ill of me for behaving as I have done, is it fair to keep me in ignorance, when they think I know and judge me as if I did ?”

“Perhaps you are right ; at any rate, Meta, I don’t want to vex you more than I can help, when you have taken so kindly what I thought would make you very angry. Don’t you remember your father ?”

“Yes—not very well. I never saw very much of him ; Mamma said he was always so busy.”

“I daresay he was. Well, you know, he was Ethert’s tutor. I believe he was doing well, but when he married he lost his fellowship, of course, and had nothing but what he could earn. Just when Ethert took his degree, or rather I think when he got his fellowship, which was before he took his degree—a very rare honour—your father died of a brain-fever. He was with a reading party hereabouts when it seized him ; and when Ethert heard of it he came down and nursed him entirely till your mother came, and helped her afterwards till the last. Well, you know, she only survived him a few months ; she was consumptive, I believe, at the time.

Her brother offered to get you into an orphan asylum ; I don't know that he could do more, he has a family of his own, and is not very well off. But Ethert would not have it. He said he could live on less than his fellowship and could earn something, and that he never would have got the fellowship so soon except for your father's teaching. So he came down to us ; Aunt Flora was with us then—the only time she has ever stayed at Glynnehurst that I remember, and Ivy heard a little of their talk and repeated it to me, who, young as I was, understood it a little better. But of course I understood very little, only I know from that and from what Mamma has said since, that Ethert persuaded my Aunt to take charge of you, providing for you himself so far as money went."

There was a little want of delicacy and consideration in the boy's frank explanation ; due less to any essential lack of kindness and good feeling than to a certain roughness or deficient sensibility ; partly no doubt the effect of school and home training, partly perhaps inherited from parents, neither of them remarkable for refined or chivalric sentiment. He was sorry at once

when he saw in her quivering lip, her deepened colour and tearful eyes, how much his words had affected his childish companion.

“I did not mean to hurt you, Meta. Remember, you would have the story. Of course it was no fault of your father’s; he had done his best, and worked very hard indeed—I believe they said his overwork killed him;—and you cannot be ashamed to have received the kindness of which you knew nothing.”

“I might have known, though,” she said in a low tone and with evident effort. “If I had cared to think I must have known that, since I was not Mrs. Glynne’s child, it was most kind of her to give me a home and to care for me; and I ought to have requited it very differently. And even for Ethert, though I could not know that I owed everything to his charity, I ought to have felt how very, very kind he was to a child who could be nothing but a trouble to him; how patient and gentle with tempers that Mrs. Glynne would not put up with.”

“Don’t talk in that way, Meta. If only because you have made me tell you, Ethert will be vexed enough; he would be grieved to the

heart to hear you use such words—speak so bitterly of what was certainly not ‘charity’ in him. You have read his last story; don’t you remember what he says, that it is so much harder to receive kindness generously than to render it?”

“Ah!” she said. “And that is not a generous way to receive his. Thank you, Charlie. Now please don’t say anything, either to him or to your Aunt.”

“That won’t do, Meta. It would be cowardly, having done what I know will vex him, to flinch from telling him.”

“You did not do it willingly. You thought I knew, and you did not find out till you had said so much that I could wring the rest from you. But do you suppose I can let them think I do not know now, or help telling him how differently I should have behaved, I hope, if I had known?”

“I wish you would not, you will only grieve Ethert—I don’t know about my Aunt. I daresay she would have told you if he would have let her; I have heard her say that secrets are foolish things; that it is best to have the truth known

and understood even when it seems awkward. It is not that I am afraid what Ethert will say to me, but I am sure he will be hurt by what you will say. Think, Meta; will it not be far pleasanter to him if you behave as you would wish to do, without letting him know that it is only because you have found out your debt to him?"

"Yes, perhaps; but it would not be honest. He would think that I was better, more grateful for his present everyday kindness, that I had learnt to be ashamed of being cross and uncivil to him without the painful lesson that I have needed—that Providence has sent me through you. No, Charlie, I must tell the truth; but I shall tell it fairly, and if I know Ethert rightly he will say nothing to you."

They had reached the gate that gave admittance into the grounds of Pine Combe Cottage, a small ivied building of limestone in the midst of a garden occupying a nearly level platform of about an acre. The latter rose almost precipitously some five or six feet above the surrounding ground, which was rough and broken, occupied partly by a sort of meadow of the somewhat

poor grass peculiar to the limestone country of the Lakes, partly by clumps of Scotch fir and groves of hazel and other brush and underwood. Thus the garden and cottage were entirely secluded. The grounds were of some little extent; but all that required care, the garden, the cow, the pony that drew Mrs. Glynne's little phaeton, was well within the strength of the elderly man who with his wife and daughter formed the household, and had been in Mrs. Glynne's service for more than twenty years. As they approached along the gravelled path that, skirting one side of the garden, reached the upper level about the middle thereof, a lady seated under the shade of a large sycamore in the centre of the lawn rose to meet them. She had long passed her fiftieth year, but having spent a wholesome quiet life in the country, retained somewhat of the form and beauty of earlier middle age. As tall as her son, a stature not remarkable in a man gave dignity and grace to a woman. Her countenance much resembled his, but, perhaps because feminine, seemed even more notably intellectual; pale and worn a little, as if by suffering or sorrow rather than by time. Her dark hair slightly sprinkled with grey,

her compressed lips, and even her dress—which, without the affectation of perpetual widow's weeds, was still distinctly that appropriated to bereavement, black relieved here and there only by white without a single vestige of colour—gave a certain severity to her whole aspect; which might account for the sort of nervous anxiety perceptible in Charlie's manner and face before she spoke, and even in those of his fair companion, distinctly more independent and high-spirited, but just now subdued by the impression which their conversation had left upon her mind.

“How is this?” the lady said. “Has Ethert left you? Or how come you to have returned alone?”

It was to Meta that she addressed herself; but for once the young lady left to her companion the task of answering, in which, as a rule, she was sufficiently ready.

“We met Mr. Cleveland and a friend of his, and Ethert turned back with them, desiring me to bring Meta here directly, as I have done, and to beg you not to wait for him, that he could not say when he would return. It wants two hours to dinner yet, does it not, Aunt? If I can do

nothing for you or Meta, I should like to go down to the lake with my fishing-rod for that time."

"You can do nothing for us, unless you can bring us some trout," the lady answered, without a smile. "Meta," as soon as she was left alone with her ward, "it might be as well if you would remember that though Charles Glynne is my nephew, he is not your cousin."

The girl started and coloured; then bit her lip, and in a few moments answered, suppressing all outward signs of that temper which her mistress evidently expected and was prepared to rebuke.

"I don't understand, Mrs. Glynne. It was Ethert who put me in his charge; and if there has been anything else that has displeased you, will you not tell me what it is? I will take care not to repeat it."

The respectful tone, the patient gentleness with which the young girl received a reproof not very gently or considerately worded, evidently surprised the hearer.

"No, Meta; I have no right to be displeased, because you have done nothing but what you

have been used to do ; and if there be fault, it is Ethert's rather than yours. Only you are no longer quite a child, and Mr. Glynne," with some emphasis on the name, "is no longer a mere schoolboy. Those who see and hear you with one another remember that you are not near relations, without remembering how you have become accustomed to consider one another almost in that light."

"Am I to call him Mr. Glynne?" Meta said, simply. "That will seem a little awkward, will it not? especially when Ethert is here, and everyone about is accustomed to call him by that name."

"Ethert has chosen," said his mother, "that you should speak to him and of him by his Christian name ; and you do right to comply, in one thing at least, with his wish. But of course Sir Charles' son is Mr. Glynne, and would be so called by any one who remembered who he is, or was accustomed to regard the formal usages of society."

"Will you not tell me then," said Meta, still controlling herself, and suppressing not only the irritation she might naturally have shown the day before, but a disposition to manifest her pain by

tears, with the more difficulty that after what she had just heard her guardian's implied reproof and coldness of manner deeply affected her, "whatever at any time there is that you do not approve? and," as Mrs. Glynne expressed her assent rather by silence and gesture than by a half-spoken word, "if you think, and I am afraid you are right, that I have not regarded Ethert's wishes as I should have done, remember I had never known exactly why I was bound to think so much of them."

She turned away as she spoke; and as Mrs. Glynne at first attached no particular meaning to her words, and only after a minute's reflection began to wonder what the child could have intended—whether accident or instinct had afforded her some insight into facts which her protector had persistently concealed, contrary to his mother's counsel—Meta was not recalled till she had reached her own room, and there given way in natural feminine fashion to mingled feelings which she was more impatient to relieve than careful to analyse.

CHAPTER III.

DREAMER AND CRITIC.

“DON’T keep me out longer than need be, Ethert,” said his mother, as, after his late meal, they stepped forth from the window of their little dining-parlour.

“Are you afraid of the night air, mother? I must not risk giving you cold; shall we go in?” he asked, in a tone whose anxious tenderness seemed held in check by habitual reserve or awe.

“No, I have never found it very trying at this season, though I must not, as you know, run risks—at least while my life is of some moment to you and to your ward. I think the fear of night air out of doors—as if it were daylight air within—is either a folly or an affectation when there is no actual cold or damp to fear. But I

don't care to leave Meta and Charlie *tête-à-tête* very long, especially after the long solitary walk you gave them this afternoon. Ethert, I wish you had not brought him here this time; and as you have brought him, I must beg you not to throw them together in the way you have done hitherto. I had to remind Meta to-day that after all they are not cousins; and though Meta behaved with unusual good sense and temper, I could not help feeling that it was hard on her, that the fault was rather yours than hers."

Ethert turned round sharply, as if he would have spoken almost in anger, then checked himself, and a few moments passed before he replied, in a tone that betrayed annoyance held under strict control:

"I wish you had spoken to me first. Since they meet so often, and he is more of a companion to Meta than I, it is natural that she should behave as she has always done, and a little hard on her to be blamed for what after all is, as you say, my fault."

"I know," said his mother, "you always think me hard on your favourite. A man would always spoil a young girl, perhaps a child like Meta even

more than one a few years older. Ethert, you must make up your mind very soon what line you really mean to take. If Meta is to be in form what she has been hitherto in fact, your adopted child, treat her as you have done, only with more of authority, less of that deference and consideration which always make her fancy herself more of the young lady than she yet is or ought to be; and make up your mind that she must know what her position is and has been, and what she owes to you. I suspect she has caught a glimpse of that already."

"I hope not!" Ethert exclaimed, now really and openly irritated. "Mother, you promised me that should never be hinted to her."

"I promised you, Ethert, that *I* would never hint it, or knowingly allow it to be hinted; and have you ever known me break or evade my word?"

She paused, evidently expecting the formal apology which her son made as a matter of course.

"But," he added, "why do you think she has guessed anything, or who could have told her?"

"Does she need to be told? As she grows old

enough to think, must she not perceive that her relation to us is anomalous? And does she not remember enough to know that I had never seen her till she came here; that you, and not I, were her father's friend?"

"Probably," said Ethert; "but that would not suggest the only thing I am anxious she should not guess—that she owes anything to me apart from yourself. My adopted child she never was or will be; whether she is to be more or less, time and she must decide."

"And you mean that she shall be much more? Ethert, if I could take your fancy seriously it would distress me; and I am aware, at your age, it is more serious than it would be with a boy who had not seen the world. You want to marry, not from your heart, but from your imagination; you are seeking a wife who will love you, not one whom you can certainly and constantly love. You could not make a greater blunder on the point on which men of your wayward, romantic temper always contrive to blunder most perversely. If you are really in love with any woman of simple womanly nature, you may trust her to love you—after marriage, if not before.

I am not so sure of a girl like Meta, whose fancy, like yours, is the dominant part of her character. Of course you can make sure of her hand, because she will not know her own heart. The girls that interest poets as young girls, and especially as children—who, at Meta's age, have what you call 'fire,' 'intelligence,' 'romance' enough to admire your writings and sympathise with your ideas—will be the wives to make you thoroughly miserable. Meta's temper is trying enough now to me who have to control it, however it may amuse and interest you. But after all, a child's petulance, even when she out-grows the discipline of childhood, is not a very grave matter; a petulant, quick-tempered wife is a serious trial to any man, an intolerable one to men like you and your father. Sensitive yourselves as women, keenly alive to tones, looks, little signs of anger or unkindness that sterner men would disregard, you would be happiest with one who had sufficient mind to appreciate yours without trying to follow it, and common sense and practical worldly wisdom enough to make up for your own deficiency; happier with a kindly good-tempered

woman of only sense sufficient for the ordinary business of life, than with a romantic, sentimental, passionate temperament far too like your own."

"With such a wife as you describe, mother, my life would be simply thrown away. Caring far more for money, and what money can buy, than for fame, caring nothing at all for all that makes life worth living to me, such a woman would be a heavy drag at best upon my ambition, would check and damp all my aspirations. She would make me feel the indulgence of my own taste, the cultivation of my own genius, if I have any, a wrong or unkindness to her. Her want of sympathy would dishearten me for any serious efforts, her influence confine me to those lower walks of my profession in which alone money is really to be made. For her sake I should feel compelled to think what *paid* in a way that she would care for. Time and effort given to work not lucrative would seem doubly stolen from her, and I could do nothing worth doing under such discouragement; in fact, I should sink into a regular literary drudge. You will not be so sorry to hear as I am to

tell you that for Meta's sake, or rather for my own, in order to be able when the time comes to ask her to share my future, I have accepted a position of that practical kind. Cleveland and some of his friends have purchased the *Courier*, and placed Lestrangé—the man whose articles over the signature of Procyon we have discussed so often and differed about so much—in charge of it. He wants an assistant to help him, to be, as he phrases it, his right hand at all times, a right hand that will work for a while automatically, under the impulse he has given, when his health or strength may fail him; and to my surprise Cleveland has thought me fit for the place—so I start for London the day after to-morrow. I shall go home with Charlie for a day or two, and then must take up my work at once. Are you quite resolved not to accept Aunt Caroline's invitation for yourself or Meta?"

"Quite," she replied. "I don't care that Meta should be intimate there—until or unless she goes there as your wife. Then it will be your affair. And for myself, you know I do not care to accept even ordinary social courtesies from Sir Charles or his wife."

"I know, mother; but I could never understand why. My uncle has been, as you yourself admit, most kind, most generous to me."

"I don't see that he has done anything for you more than, with his means and his small family, it was decent that the head of the house should do for his only brother's only child. But I grant he has done more than I ever expected, very much more than he ever did for your father; and knowing what I know of him, I cannot but suppose that he has good reason for conduct so little in keeping with his general character."

"I cannot bear," replied Ethert, "to discuss with you a subject on which we both feel so strongly and differ so entirely. At any rate, I must judge a man by his conduct to me; or if you cannot allow that, at least you will admit that, having accepted his kindness, I must behave as a dutiful nephew to such an uncle."

"I would not," rejoined his mother, "have you other than respectful to the head of your family. But, remember, you owe him little as yet; I have done my best, not unsuccessfully, to prevent your placing yourself under obligations that might fetter you hereafter. Pray remember this,

Ethert, and beware of accepting anything that might render you dependent on the continuance of his good-will, or hamper you if you had to assert rights of your own against him or his."

"How could that be, mother?"

"I can't tell you how it could be," she answered; "but I know your uncle too well to doubt that he foresees at least possible contingencies in which it might suit him to have secured your good-will—to be able to put forward what would seem to you, with your exaggerated sensibility, strong claims on your practical consideration. I never knew him to do a generous or unselfish thing to any but yourself; certainly not, as I have told you, to your father. Lady Glynne dislikes me as I her, and I am at a loss to understand the anxiety she has shown for many years past, first to make up what never was a quarrel, and never could be other than coldness between us, and next, when that was impossible, to win your favour or affection. I am sorry you are to leave us so soon; I am glad you have found regular practical work, and if it do not end in the accomplishment of your particular object, it

will, I think, have done you good upon the whole."

"Very likely," replied her son. "At any rate I am not sorry that fate or Providence has taken the shaping of my career out of my own hands. Mother, I shall not see much of you or of Meta now. I shall be closely tied to my desk in London. Don't misunderstand me if I ask you not to let my Pearl miss what you call my spoiling; to be a little more indulgent to her—rather perhaps to her fancies and her sensitive-ness—now that she is, as you say yourself, no longer quite a child."

"I am afraid," she returned, coldly, but without any sign of that displeasure which Ethert had evidently intended to deprecate, "that there can never be anything like sympathy between me and that wayward child. It is a pity, perhaps, that she has no companion who will be indulgent to her moods, and sympathise with her romance more than I, if less than you do. But depend upon it, Ethert, if you really wish to win her love as a woman, it is well that you should cease to see so much of her while you can hardly consider her more than a child, and she necessarily looks

upon you rather as a guardian than in any more romantic light—while her affection must be necessarily filial or sisterly.”

“That she doesn’t regard me as a guardian,” returned Ethert, smiling, “I think her keen resentment of any approach to control or reproof from me sufficiently demonstrates. But for the rest no doubt you are right, though I can hardly help fretting that I shall see so little of either of you for years to come. Well, let her be still to me a child till I do go; let us enjoy one more holiday together before that change in our relations comes that must be, and that absence will render easier and more natural.”

They re-entered the house, and Mrs. Glynne’s eyes turned at once upon her ward, and observed, somewhat to her surprise, and certainly to her satisfaction, that Meta was not as usual engaged in chat, or rather chatter, or on her favourite game of chess, with Charlie. He was reading somewhat listlessly and with many yawns his cousin’s last prose work, a book which he honestly endeavoured to admire for its author’s sake, while of his incapacity to understand it he was sincerely and loyally ashamed; which Meta had enjoyed,

understood, and, to the writer's intense though secret delight, cried over with sympathy and appreciation as earnest, if not with as full a comprehension, as a woman of twice her years might have shown. Meta herself was occupied, conscientiously but wearily, with needlework, an occupation which she detested so heartily that even Mrs. Glynne's authority could hardly enforce attentive perseverance thereat in her own absence. The latter, approaching her nephew, expressed, with an evident effort to be kindly and cordial, her regret at their speedy parting; while Ethert, bending over Meta, spoke low, gently, with a sort of studied, not affected, deference and courtesy.

"I go up to town the day after to-morrow, Pearl, and I am not likely to be here again for many months to come; certainly not till Christmas, perhaps not till next summer. I should have dearly liked to pass my last day among these Lakes in one of those excursions you used to like as well as I. Have you so far forgiven me for yesterday that I may entreat your company?"

The young girl looked up quickly, half shyly,

and to his surprise her colour had deepened, and her eyes were full of tears.

“Don’t talk so, Ethert. Forgive me my petulance; indeed I am heartily ashamed of it, and you said much less than I deserved.”

The humility, the earnestness, if not the frankness of her apology were so unusual that Ethert, used to the simple child-like ease of her penitence as to her passionate outbreaks of wayward humour, was actually startled.

“Has my mother heard, and been scolding her?” he thought. “But it is hardly like Pearl to be the more repentant if she had done penance against her will—I was frightened, and with reason,” he answered. “There was more risk than you knew, Pearl, and I could not but be angry even with you while I felt how narrowly you had escaped a serious danger. If anyone else had exposed you to such a chance of drowning, you would have seen how differently I should have spoken, how hard I should have found it to forgive; but even fear for yourself should not have led me to speak so sharply to a lady.”

“I am not a lady, yet,” she answered, frankly and half-smiling, “and no one but you ever seems

to fancy me so. It is like you, who have a right to treat me as a child, that you are always the most polite as well as the kindest to me. Yes, if you will take me with you, and your mother does not object, I should like it so much. I should have been very sorry if yesterday's were to have been our last excursion together."

CHAPTER IV.

A POET'S HOLIDAY.

“**A**RE you going with us?” Meta said, with no little surprise, and with a slight but manifest chagrin in her tone, as, loitering in the garden, awaiting Ethert’s leisure shortly after their early breakfast, she was joined by Charlie with his fishing rod and creel.

Charles Glynne laughed good-humouredly. “You don’t want me, Meta, that’s very plain. But it is your fault I have got to go with you so far. Evidently Ethert won’t put up the sail again, and I am to help him to row you across; then I shall stay fishing till you return; or—no—it’s so clear you don’t want me, I’ll take care to get tired before you come back, and leave him to find a boat at the ferry.”

“I am very sorry,” said Meta, colouring. “I did not mean—but——”

“Now don’t be vexed, and don’t try to explain away,” said the lad, kindly and laughingly. “I am sure it is very natural you should wish to have Ethert to yourself on his last day; and in truth, Meta, I am pretty certain that Ethert wants me just as little as you do. But I am sorry my aunt will not bring you to Glynnehurst; can’t you persuade her? It is a very beautiful old-fashioned place; the castle, though it is small, is interesting to strangers, as most castles are, and comfortable, as they scarcely ever seem to be. Ivy wants to see you again very much indeed, and if she thinks I have not done my best to bring you and my aunt, I shall not have a very cordial welcome home; and my mother I know pressed most earnestly. If Aunt Flora won’t come herself she might let you.”

“Hardly,” replied Meta. “If Mrs. Glynné would go, I should be very glad indeed to see Ivy again, and should like above all things to see Glynnehurst, as Ethert has described it so often. It is the original, is it not, of the ‘Old Castle’ in his second book?”

“Upon my word,” said Charlie. “I don’t know. It is very stupid of me, but I never thought. I am so dull; I can understand and enjoy Ethert’s society and talk exceedingly when we are alone or there is no clever person of the company; but when Cleveland, or Gerard, or Sterne are with us I find myself going off into a dream, not understanding a word; and even when he is talking with you, I find it often nearly as hard to follow as his books.”

“Nonsense! I am sure you must understand whatever I can.”

“Indeed I don’t, Meta. For instance, now, I *can’t* understand why you should not come to Glynnehurst, even if my aunt will not.”

“Do you, after the way you scolded me yesterday,” returned Meta, half earnestly, half playfully, “think that I ought even to wish to leave her alone here?”

“Oh, if it is a case of ‘ought,’ I have nothing to say. So long as you *do* wish it, I may have some hope after all.”

Ethert joined them here, and the trio walked down towards the landing-place, about a mile distant.

“Ethert,” said his cousin, “my mother will be so vexed that Aunt Flora won’t come to us this year. She has not been to Glynnehurst for seven or eight years; and at any rate if she will not come you might bring Meta, and leave her there.”

“My mother must decide; and I am afraid she has made up her mind that she cannot leave home, and will not part with Meta.”

They reached the boat and unlocked the oars. As Charlie was about to remove the mast with sail wrapped round it that lay in the bottom, Ethert caught sight of the downcast eyes and deepening colour of his fair charge.

“Leave them, Charlie. Only promise me you will not put them up when you are alone; it takes two hands to manage helm and sail safely. The wind is against us crossing, and we shall make more progress with the oars.”

Meta understood his motive; and tears of affectionate penitence came into her eyes as she recalled more than one similar instance of studious consideration for her childish sensitiveness, unnoticed or ungraciously received at the time. She took the tiller ropes, steering carefully among the many boats of various size moored or

fastened in the little bay, and between the islands, as the men vigorously plied the oars. Charlie's athletic eagerness impelled him to pull with a needless energy, which obliged Ethert on his part to put forth his full strength, and neither had leisure or breath for speech. Meta, too familiar with the beautiful scene to be long absorbed in its contemplation, gradually fell into a sort of reverie—perhaps rather reflection, meditating on the explanation she desired to effect with her guardian when they should be alone—inconsistent with the vigilant performance of her duty; and was first aroused to a consciousness of her neglect by an exclamation from Charlie, and a sudden inclination of the right-hand gunwale almost to the level of the water, as the boat ran on a sunken rock with whose locality she was not unacquainted.

“Are you asleep or dreaming, Meta?” cried her younger companion sharply, as, dropping his oar, the boat was righted by a vigorous pull from Ethert. “If he were not here, I should tell you you deserved—what you talked of yesterday.”

“You are very rude, Sir,” the girl answered, but with perfect good temper, not even at the moment disposed to resent the rough criticism of

her playfellow as she had done the gentler reprimand of her guardian on a similar occasion. "If we had been alone, as you say, I should not have cared if I had given you a ducking."

"Take care, Pearl," said Ethert, looking round. "Remember we have not eyes at the back of our heads; don't run us aground on yonder shoal."

"I bet you we could clear it," said Charlie.

"You may try when you are alone; you will find the lake is two inches too low."

"Try, Meta," said the boy, laughing.

"I am not going to set the example of mutiny," she answered, "especially after your hint. Ethert, are we going to land at the ferry, or in the bay yonder?"

"Which you please, if you don't mind the scramble ashore in the bay."

Meta silently exercised the choice assigned to her in favour of the natural shore, where the birches, rooted among the low rocks, dipped their long graceful foliage into the water that just allowed the boat's stern to float while her bow touched the ground. Springing out, Ethert caught her as she was about to step on the wet stones, and swung her clear on to the ledge of

rock that afforded a dry convenient landing place.

“We shall not see you from here, Charlie. I suppose we shall get back to the ferry about four : if we cannot see and hail you then, we must hire a boat.”

“You won’t see me,” said Charlie, somewhat mischievously ; “Meta has let me know she doesn’t wish to see any more of me to-day. I think she means to claim the whole of your last afternoon at home.”

A day or two before the suggestion would have seemed to Meta simply natural ; in her kindlier moods, she would have preferred the claim with perfect frankness. Some change of feeling that she could not have explained to herself made her shy and silent as, without deigning to reply to Charlie’s nonsense, Ethert assisted her through the underwood and over the stones till they reached the shady lane that wound at some few yards’ distance along the shore of the lake, between the rocky bank and the gradual slopes—thorn and grass covered, shaded by hazel, birch, mountain ash, and here and there by larches or Scotch firs—of the low western fells.

“Will you venture on a scramble, Pearl, or shall we wait till we reach the path? Perhaps you will mind tearing your dress now, more than you did when we made our way through this brush last year?”

“I remember,” she answered, “how completely that was my own fault; how much care you took to beat the brambles down and clear me when they caught me, if I had not been too impatient to wait for your help. And my frock would have been drenched and muddied as well as torn, if you had not lifted me in my own despite across the stream. Ethert, I wondered even that day, after we got home, why and how you could be so patient and so polite to an ill-tempered child. I used to suppose that grown men never got angry or careless with girls, and that it was only schoolboys like Charlie who could be provoked to answer one—as I deserved; or I should have thought more of your kindness.”

“And what has enlightened you now?” he asked, smiling. “Have you seen so much of the ways of other grown men?”

“Very little, as you know. But your mother used to tell me, though I never minded it much,

‘No one else will ever put up with you as Ethert does,’ and the more you petted the more she seemed resolved to check me. No; don’t you suppose even I must think a little as I grow older, and ask the reason of things I used to take for granted?”

The tone in which her last words were spoken had become so grave and earnest that her companion looked at her with observant though brief and carefully concealed scrutiny.

“And what,” he said, lightly, “has your new thoughtfulness suggested? Or what has been put into your head to give you new views of what seemed matter of course?”

“Your mother said yesterday that your cousin is not quite a schoolboy. I suppose now he is as civil to me as most young men would be; and though of course he is never rude, do you think I don’t see the difference between his ways and yours? He says what comes into his head, he does not care whether I like it or not. He as good as told me so; and if I am cross to him he laughs at me, or gives it me back again.

“I am afraid,” he answered, smiling, “that I too have shown that I can be cross.”

“Ethert, that just touches what I mean. Will you tell me that another man in your place would not have spoken quite as sharply, without caring whether it hurt me, or dreaming of—well, almost apologising for it afterwards? And, don’t think me presumptuous, you *do* seem to care, not only whether you hurt me, but that I hurt you. I hope it is not so; I shall be very glad if you will tell me that when my wayward humours, my rude speeches make you look so grave and sad, you do not really mind.”

“Would not that be to tell you, Pearl, that I do not care for her who was my pet as a little child, and has become my companion and friend of late? Of course it pains me for the moment when you seem to think that I have treated you unkindly; when I seem to have given you pain.”

“Why should you care?” she asked, impetuously. “If I had nothing else to thank you for, you have been so kind in every little incident of every-day life, you make the time so pleasant, so bright for me when you are at home, you have taken so much trouble for me—that you ought to treat my temper, even if you

were as young as Charlie, or I were not a child, only as wilful, ungrateful naughtiness; instead of fancying that you can have been unkind or that I can think you so. But when you know what I really owe you, what could you do, after that, that could give me right or reason to complain; that I ought not to bear, if you had ever given me anything to bear, without returning, without presuming to resent it?"

"What has been said to you? What are you talking of?" he asked quickly.

"Ethert, you must not be angry except with me, for it was my fault, and only mine. I was cross when Charlie said you would not let him take me home by the lake; I spoke so ungratefully that he was shocked, and in scolding me he said something that made me insist on knowing what he meant; and he really could not keep it back."

"What could he tell you, Pearl? No,"—as her lips parted and the light in her eyes showed that she was about to answer with passionate eagerness—"he could only tell you that I owed very much to your father's kindness and care; that when my tutor's child, who had been my pet

and plaything in the holidays, was left alone, I was only too glad to bring her to brighten my home and my mother's. I am very sorry you have heard anything, thought anything of this yet."

"How can you say so? Would you have had me go on so thoughtlessly, so ungratefully, till even a boy like Charlie was shocked and ashamed of me, that I could speak so angrily, disrespectfully of your mother, who had done a mother's part for me, of you to whose kindness I owe not only my bread—that is a less thing—but a home—home tenderness and happiness instead of the dreary life of a school or an asylum? Ethert, it makes me bitterly ashamed how I have behaved to you, though I did not know—but I might have known if I had cared to think."

"Don't exaggerate, Pearl. You will find, when you are a few years older, that no one would wonder, no one fancy that I at any rate had done anything of which you need think much. Don't talk of gratitude or ingratitude, child—*that* can only pain me; but be sure that if you can, instead, give us the same simple home-affection you would have given to a mother and a brother,

we shall both feel, shall be more than repaid for any trouble we have taken for you."

"But say," she urged earnestly, "say that you believe, you know I would not have behaved so to you, if I had known or thought that—"

"I know, Pearl, you would never say or do an unkind thing if you did but think; that you never had an unkind thought for either of us."

"And you forgive me?"

"If I have anything to forgive, assuredly. Now, Pearl, in kindness to me never speak of this again. Think, speak, behave to me, I will not say as you always have done, but as if nothing had ever occurred to you that you had not thought of before now. See, we have reached our favourite resting-place. Look at the bright clear picture of the opposite hills and woods in the lake, smooth as glass just now; and the bright golden light just there, where the windows of the Castle flash back the sunshine upon the surface. I don't like to think how long it will be before we shall see this scene together again. The time I have spent in London has always seemed to me, especially in Spring and Summer, simply

as so much cut wholly out of my life ; and when in April or May I see the limes in the park clothed with their bright fresh green foliage, and hear the chirping of the sparrows, which reminds me of the music that fills our woods, I can scarcely keep the tears out of my eyes."

"And yet," she replied, "you choose of your own accord to go back and to live, you say, for years in London, and scarcely to come here but for a rare holiday. Why?"

"Why does anyone live in London who can help it, except those who care for balls and theatres more than for scenes like this, that no painter, if he gave a lifetime to it, could equal, and walks like ours among these hills? Simply because one can earn money in town ; one can hardly do more than spend it in the country."

"But you don't care so much for money?" she said, enquiringly. "You do not seem to wish for anything you have not. Ethert, it is not for my sake, it is not that you have enough for yourself, but not enough to do what you have always done by me? I could not bear to think that! It is not your kindness to me that forces you to

leave your home and live in a place you hate so?"

"And to leave you and my mother, whom I love better than any place, even this? No, Pearl; I cannot explain now. Ask me three years hence, and I hope I may be able to tell you, to show you that I am neither avaricious nor selfish; no, nor yet making a sacrifice for you: you have never cost me one yet."

They had reached the highest point on that line of fells, having emerged some time before from the wood, which seldom reaches the summit even of the lower hills; and where they stood had a clear unbroken view for some fifteen miles of one of the most beautiful, perhaps the most perfectly beautiful scene in England. The upper portion of the lake, immediately at their feet, was more than a mile in width, and for three or four miles of its length unbroken by islands, surrounded on either side by hills; their lower slopes densely wooded, their upper ridges standing out, covered for the most part with brown heather or greyish-green grass, crowned commonly by masses of grey rock near the actual summit. Far to the left rose the highest hills of Cumberland,

their slopes almost entirely naked, so distant that only their graceful or rugged outlines were distinguishable. To the right, the lower part of the lake so narrowed that among and below the islands it seemed rather to resemble a river, but a river wider than any to be seen in England, or indeed in Western Europe. It was one of those rare afternoons when not a breath of wind disturbs the perfect evenness of the surface, which, not like that of the calmest sea ruffled by a continual swell, was actually smooth and clear as glass, reflecting every object, every detail of the surrounding scenery, as distinctly as the most polished mirror could have done. Both turned and looked upon the scene for some moments in silence, Meta appreciating its exquisite and varied beauty quite as keenly as could the most romantic or artistic lady long since emerged from the childhood which she had not yet left behind. Glancing up at last into the face of her companion, she was painfully struck by the intense sadness of its expression. Ethert knew, as she did not, the dreariness, dulness, dispiriting effect of a town life to a lover of nature; understood and felt, while she could only imagine, all

that he was giving up. The years already spent in London had been unspeakably wearisome, and such pleasures as they had afforded had long since utterly palled upon his taste. London had for him none of the consolation that Meta could fancy in picture-galleries, museums, and libraries, even more than in its distinctly social enjoyments.

“You must have very strong reason,” she said, timidly but earnestly; “but I must not ask you what it is. But I am *very* sorry, both for your sake and for my own.”

He pressed her little hand, but did not answer; and after a pause of two or three minutes she spoke again in a lighter tone, but with equally deep and yet more unselfish sympathy, desiring to divert his mind from thoughts that were evidently painful.

“Ethert, I wish I could paint these views for you, to console you in your London lodging. Why would you never teach me to draw?”

“Can you not guess?” he said with a smile.

“I am afraid I can,” she answered, gravely. “For the same reason that you would never teach me anything except swimming; and that I

suppose only because I would venture on the lake, and you thought it too dangerous if I could not swim; and nobody else could teach me."

"True, Pearl. I have been thoroughly selfish in the division I made with my mother, leaving to her all that was disagreeable and troublesome in her charge, and taking to myself all I could that was only pleasant, that could leave none but agreeable memories with you."

"And you think all lessons must have left unpleasant ones? Well, I dare say I deserve it: but we had no trouble that I remember over the one thing you did teach me."

"How could we, Pearl? unless you had been as great a coward as many young ladies, in which case I am afraid I should not have tried the experiment."

"They were the only lessons that never cost me a tear," she said; "and I think that was not the only reason. But now I wish you had taught me to draw, whatever trouble it had given us both, as your mother cannot. And is it really true that most girls are such cowards? What in the world was there to be afraid of? You would

not let me drown, I knew; and if you had, they always say it is not a painful death."

"No, the painful thing is coming back to life. But most people, women at least, fear death itself more than the pain that attends it."

"I cannot understand that. What is there to fear, unless indeed one expects—what you never would let me learn to think possible? I remember once, soon after I first came here, Mr. Whitefield's sermons *did* make me horribly afraid to die, made me so frightened in the darkness. Your mother cured me of screaming; but till she gave me a light I lay awake night after night crying silently with terror. I always wondered what made her give way about it, after she had been so severe; for I never dared to tell her what really frightened me so."

"You told *me*, Pearl, and I never forgave Mr. Whitefield. Don't you remember, it was your account of your terrors and your dreams that made me talk to you of death, and what may lie beyond it—the only subject of the kind on which I have ever cared to speak to you?"

"I have taken all my thoughts on those sub-

jects from you, I think," she answered, "or from Mr. Vere."

"Who," said Ethert, lightly, "never mentions hell to ears polite."

"For shame, Ethert! Mr. Vere never conceals, never neglects to insist that evil must be punished, and that its punishment must in some sense be eternal, since the mischief it has done to ourselves, to our own natures, can never be quite undone, must always throw us back behind those who have not erred so much, perhaps may separate us from them for ever. That is terrible enough, and I think would frighten me now more than Mr. Whitefield's flames and red-hot scourges. But surely we can trust ourselves, our future, to the Power that has made this life so full of beauty? and unless we distrust Him I cannot see why we should be afraid of passing into another state, where many of our troubles here must, I suppose, be left behind."

"Do you really feel that, Pearl? Did you ever think of death, try to realise it? I hope you do not, but I did before I was your age. Are you not afraid? Do you not shrink from it more than from any possible pain?"

“Not at all,” she answered; “I don’t understand when I read of people enduring terrible operations rather than die, like Dr. Johnson. Ethert, what *can* there be to fear, and why does the Church teach us to pray against sudden death?”

“That,” he answered, “is, like most of the prayers in our Liturgy, borrowed I suppose from Rome. She taught that salvation might depend upon death-bed absolution. There I agree with you entirely. I would rather die without having time to fear or suffer.”

“I don’t think I should prefer that,” she answered, thoughtfully; “I should like to know, to have a few words to say, perhaps, after I knew that all was over here. But so long as people really believe in Heaven I cannot understand why they are afraid of going there, or why they are heart-broken when their friends or children are gone there. Perhaps they don’t remember how many hard things there are in childhood; they have forgotten their own, or they would not be so bitterly grieved to think that their children are happy where they will rejoin them in a few years.”

"I am afraid," he replied, deeply touched, and avoiding the graver aspect of her remarks, "that you have had for many reasons a harder childhood than others. Of course it must be so; nothing can make up to an orphan the loss of father and mother."

"*You* should not say that, Ethert. It is my fault, not yours—or," she added, more constrainedly, and as if from a sense of duty rather than from cordial feeling, "your mother's—if I have not been as happy as any child could be. But was it only that you would not teach me drawing yourself? May I learn it if I can find a teacher at any time, and your mother agrees?"

"Most certainly; and if I had time now I would try to teach you myself—on condition, Pearl, that I should give it up on our first, or, at least, our second, quarrel over it."

"Ethert, that is so strange a word for you to use! It struck me last night: what other man of your age, in your position, would talk of quarrelling with a child?"

"I ought to be ashamed of it, certainly," he answered, smiling.

“No, no : it ought not to have been possible for me. I ought not to have dared, any more than with your mother. And you never quarrel—that has been all on my side.”

“Hardly, dear ; and I am afraid it would not be, even after our last experience, if you should frighten me again as you did then.”

“Were you frightened for yourself, Ethert, or only for me?”

“Both, Pearl. I should dislike exceedingly to be drowned, apart from the humiliation of perishing, as strangers on these lakes often do, by sheer neglect or ignorance. If they had found the sheet fast, every Lakesman would have said, ‘Well, *he* knew better!’ But I believe honestly, so far as I can tell, that it was of you, and not of myself, that I thought at the moment.”

“It was of me that you spoke, certainly, and I fancy that you were too much startled just then not to say exactly what you thought. Well, that was our last quarrel, as you chose to call it. When you tell me three years hence why you leave us, remember and say whether I have quarrelled with you, or given you cause to quarrel with me, again.”

CHAPTER V.

COUSINHOOD.

“WE will walk then, Charlie, if you have no objection, and the trap shall take our luggage only.”

“How is my father, Thomas?” said the youth, addressing the liveried servant, who with some little difficulty reined in the high-spirited horse while Charlie’s holiday baggage and Ethert’s small portmanteau were piled in the dog-cart sent from Glynnehurst to meet them at the nearest railway-station, some three miles distant.

“Not so well, Sir, I am afraid,” said the groom, touching his hat. “Sir Charles has not been out, except in the garden, for three weeks past, and I have not seen him at all this last week. Jackson said that he had been troubled again; could not say what he seemed to mean to.”

“Then,” said Charlie to his cousin, as they walked on, “I understand why Ivy wrote as if she wished I were at home, before your sudden change of plans. I suppose the Governor is really worse; I know that thing frightened Mamma before.”

“And well it might!” said his elder and better-informed companion, “if I understand the man rightly. You never told me of this, Charlie; my Uncle’s fit must have been something graver than you led me to suppose, or than I inferred from my Aunt’s letter. That symptom means mischief.”

“Mamma don’t like to talk about it, I know. Surely there’s nothing in his hesitating and blundering about words? And Orme never said a word to me, only to Mamma, something—that he had feared paralysis. But that can’t be, you know; he has been about, and even on horseback, since then. But he was nervous, certainly, and didn’t care to take his fences; and now you make me think of it, he told me I might take Prince Rupert. You know how fiery Rupert is, and my father would not let anyone else ride him. It looked, I thought, as if

he felt himself getting too old for such a beast."

"More than that, I am afraid. Charlie, if I were you I would put off Oxford for three months, unless he is better."

"You don't mean that you think there is danger?" exclaimed the younger cousin, a sufficiently dutiful if not a very affectionate son to the father who had shown less than ordinary paternal interest in his only son and heir.

"We shall know better, perhaps, to-morrow; and at any rate we will speak of it again before I go. I am rather sorry, if it turns out so, that I cannot stay after Monday."

They had reached the gates of the park, beautifully kept, with splendid old native and many rare and carefully cultivated exotic trees; broken too by woods some hundred years old and by deep narrow glades and ravines, the beds cut by immemorial streamlets through the soft chalk, as well as by dales filled with thick bracken fern, among which a few deer, almost tame, were couched. These sprang up, but scarcely cared to start away as the pair passed close to their haunts. The park was of no great extent, neither the house nor its

appurtenances being proportionate to the present wealth of its owners.

The Glynnes had held their actual estates, or the greater part thereof, since the founder of the family first emerged from the state of a city merchant in the reign of Elizabeth. But at that time the value of their land had not been great. Careful cultivation, the drainage of swamps, the reclamation of wastes, and the growth of town populations at no great distance, as well as the discovery of valuable minerals on an outlying part of their domain, had greatly increased the fortunes of a family always careful and thrifty, till their present representative, after a long minority, succeeded to the property. Sir Charles had been a man of pleasure, of expensive tastes, but he had never been a gambler; he had lost his first wife not many years after their marriage, after having lived with her almost exclusively abroad, and he had not married his second and present wife till he had reached middle age. If, therefore, he had spent his full income and saved little or nothing, he had not seriously impaired the value of his property. Some tenants, as Ethert happened to know, had recently asked and even pressed for

expensive improvements, which they had failed to obtain. But if Sir Charles were embarrassed, which there was no other reason to suppose, it was not by the size of his mansion or the style of his establishment; which, under the management of the second Lady Glynne, though comfortable and sufficient, was distinctly modest and even economical.

The house or castle stood on the edge of a portion of the park which rose some fifty feet above the level of the rest, where a chalk cliff, almost precipitous, broke for some miles the general surface of the country, otherwise level or undulating. It embodied a part of an older feudal fortress of secondary importance, the modern portion of the building having been skilfully constructed in the same general style, but of smaller dimensions, and with sole regard to comfort and convenience in the arrangement of the interior. The front, close to the edge of the cliff, was bounded at either extremity by a tower of four stories in height, the one to the left of those who now faced it ancient and worn, the other of Tudor and Stuart date, both projecting far beyond the line and actually touching the

precipice, so as to render the terrace between them inaccessible save from the house itself. The entrance was in the modern part of the dwelling, in the centre of the side front, approached from the lower land by a road cut in the chalk ; which ascended at an incline the face of the cliff, and then passed round the Spring or south-eastward garden, separating it from the rest of the grounds.

The gardens and lawns were kept in the most perfect order, shaded by large and ancient trees, among which grew some of the first Wellingtonias and many of the first rhododendrons ever introduced into this country. Though not of great extent, yet whenever in the absence of the family opened to public inspection, they attracted numerous visitors from the neighbouring town, and Ethert had always found in them new and strong attractions on every successive visit. These had, since his entrance at the great public school of — made him in some measure his own master, been frequent. Both Sir Charles and Lady Glynne had pressed him to spend with them first his brief Easter holidays, during which he had hardly leisure to reach his distant home,

afterwards a portion at least of each Christmas vacation, when the Lakes were least attractive, and latterly had induced him to pass more than one summer month at Glynnehurst. Both had always treated him with signal kindness and consideration. If Sir Charles could not put himself out of the way for any one, could not take the trouble or derange his own habits for more important personages than a schoolboy nephew who was not his heir, he had taken care that all besides, grooms, gamekeepers, horses, should be at his young guest's service; and had tipped him on his every return to school with a liberality that, to the son of a widowed mother with a straitened income, was almost as surprising as satisfactory. When on his removal to Oxford he had necessarily declined this kind of favour, Sir Charles had written to his mother, insisting on his right as head of the family to increase his nephew's allowance, if not to defray altogether the expense of his education; and when Ethert distinguished himself by gaining an open University scholarship, his Uncle had not only written a letter of what seemed—especially in a man by no means studious—exaggerated praise and congratulation,

but had enclosed a cheque of pecuniary value greater than that of the scholarship itself.

But from the first, Ethert, always a considerate and unobtrusive guest, had observed and been affected by the personal kindness and affectionate regard of his Aunt more than even by his Uncle's generosity. Quiet, grave, somewhat languid, and not demonstrative even with her own children, though almost always soft and kindly, Lady Glynne had shown to her nephew a consideration, a half-maternal tenderness, that won his boyish heart the more from its contrast to the cold and somewhat stern manner which, since her widowhood, his mother could never lay aside. Perhaps the Aunt's kindness and goodwill, her anxious care to render her nephew's visits as pleasant as possible, were more natural than they seemed to the unfriendly observation of her sister-in-law. Even as a schoolboy Ethert was distinguished by two peculiarities rare in boys, and not very common now-a-days even in young men. He was as by instinct punctiliously courteous to ladies, and, what probably impressed Lady Glynne yet more favourably, fond of children.

From their very cradles Charlie and Ivy took

cordially to the only relative they knew, clung about him, accompanied him everywhere within the bounds to which they were necessarily confined; and as they grew older relied on his protection in more distant excursions, only permitted when he was with them. He never seemed impatient of the trouble they gave, or weary of their company; he had helped Charlie alike with his lessons and his sports, had taught him to fish and to row, if not to ride. Both cousins looked forward to his visits quite as eagerly as himself, and were loud in their complaints when his college vacations or the rarer leisure of his later life were devoted to his mother and Margaret rather than to themselves. With an elder brother they could not have been more fully at ease, and would probably have been less consistently and invariably indulged. Charlie looked up to and admired his elder cousin, as boys are apt to look up to men who, if only in right of age, excel in all the pursuits they are beginning to understand and enjoy. But Ivy's quieter affection was, as Ethert and her mother at least well understood, a much deeper, rarer, more tenacious feeling; and had lasted through infancy,

childhood, and girlhood, as such attachments seldom can last. Educated entirely at home, and even now too young for general society, Ivy had been far more than most young girls secluded from the habitual companionship of her youthful neighbours. This seclusion was due mainly to accidental circumstances, partly to her mother's evident but hitherto inexplicable shrinking from anything like intimate association with ladies of her own rank, but partly also to her own sensitive shyness. Her father had been indifferent and impatient; her mother gentle, affectionate, but given to a kind of subdued irritability or suppressed querulousness necessarily unintelligible to her daughter, apt also to suggest by snatches of half-confidential talk a curiosity which frightened her back into silence and capricious repression. Charlie was simply and thoroughly boyish, a schoolboy of the rougher Rugby type, fond of his sister, but not willing to be "bothered" by her claims; seldom wilfully unkind or teasing for teasing's sake, but contemptuous of girlish helplessness and cowardice, and prone to bully her for her own good. He would have made a tom-boy of a high-spirited only sister, who would

simply have adored him ; but he rather cowed and frightened one too nervous to like rough play and too soft to bear rough words. Ethert only, lonelier than herself, had taken an earnest loving interest in the solitary child, had found or made in her an object of thought and conscious affection, a source of occupation and of happiness. His baby cousin was his first, and till he reached manhood, his only “pet”—the only creature he was free to fondle, to protect, to make happy, to take thought and trouble for. Himself pensive and sensitive even in boyhood, he felt far more attracted by her than by her active, daring, noisy brother ; he was intensely gratified by her infantine fondness, early won and firmly held ; delighted in the lisping syllables of tenderness linked with his name, the soft clinging caresses of the tiny arms that could not yet meet around his neck ; and year by year the hold of each on the heart of the other had grown unconsciously faster and closer. Neither mother, nor nurse, nor even governess could fail to observe how restless, how eager the dull quiet child became, when the anticipation of Ethert’s holiday visit came within the narrow horizon that bounds our vision of the future at eight years

old ; how intense and intent was her hour-long watch for his arrival at the furthest point to which she and Charlie might go to meet him, how much happier, livelier, more intelligent, even stronger in health and spirits she seemed whilst his visit lasted, how silently she drooped and pined when it was over. It surprised the most observant and thoughtful of her teachers to see that Lady Glynn rather indulged and favoured a depth and exclusiveness of attachment which most mothers would have done their best for the child's sake to weaken. But it might have proved impossible, it certainly would have been cruel to attempt roughly or hastily to sever that strange tie. As for Ethert, Ivy was the first thing he had dearly loved with that protecting love, conscious of superiority, which is ever the strongest in a masculine nature, so Ethert seemed to Ivy the one person who really "cared for her ;" to whom her happiness (not merely her moral and physical well-being) was an object of active solicitude. Her mother compassionated her fears, her father scolded her, her brother teased and laughed at her for them ; Ethert understood, sympathised with, averted them, would not let her be frightened,

and had effectually deterred others from practising on her nerves. Ethert she knew was never too busy to attend to her, never too eager to hear her call or catch her look of appeal. Her timidity when mounted even on her quiet Shetland pony irritated her father's impatient temper, and provoked the ridicule of her daring brother. But Ethert would always walk beside her, and, when his patient teaching and gentle encouragement had brought her to dispense with such close attendance, was content to forego his own pleasure in a ride across country, or a gallop on the roadside turf, to hold her leading rein and keep the pace that suited her. Ethert only was never angry with her slowness of movement or of apprehension ; and yet, she thought, how good a right he had ; how much cleverer was he, who could always understand, was never impatient, than those who evidently thought and sometimes called her a fool ! Ethert could even make her school hours tolerable ; if she could but bring a lesson to him before she had to present it, she felt safe. He could always enlighten and explain where her teachers could but repeat the set explanation that only bewildered her still further ; could but perplex, frighten, and

punish. And, indeed, no one liked to deal harshly with Ivy, stubborn and wilful as her fits of dulness sometimes seemed, when her cousin was at hand ; so touching was the child's unselfish anxiety that Ethert should not be pained by knowing her in trouble or disgrace, so evidently earnest was the man's sympathy with the passing sorrows of the sensitive child. To scold Ivy in Ethert's actual presence was what, somehow, none but Sir Charles would wittingly have ventured.

As she grew towards those inconvenient years when young men hardly know how to bear themselves toward young maidens who are neither strangers nor sisters—the earliest teens, when girls are not children, yet are not young ladies, no longer open to the freedom of play, but incapable of conversation, and not yet licensed to flirt—his mother's warnings, tinged with the gravity that gave exaggerated force to her every reproof or admonition, and sharpened by her instinctive distrust of her brother and sister-in-law, startled and disturbed Ethert. His own childhood had known no girl playmate ; he had never made acquaintance with the younger sisters of his schoolfellows ; and so interpreting his mother's

counsel as to feel that he must lose, when she passed completely into the schoolroom, the sister-like cousin who had been his darling since he first lifted her from her cradle, he turned for solace and compensation to Meta, then for the first time a companion as well as an object of compassionate interest.

But on his next visit to Glynnehurst the constraint and awkwardness of his first meeting with Ivy at once revealed to Lady Glynne what had passed. She knew as well as if she had heard it what her sister-in-law had said; knew what came from her, what was the work of Ethert's own imagination, and was amused to think that the poet and critic of five-and-twenty had little more knowledge of life, little more command of countenance and manner than the schoolboy of fifteen. It pleased or it suited her to restore the affectionate ease and intimacy of old, and she had the tact, the instinctive insight into character, that taught her how thoroughly both cousins might be trusted without a word of guidance to fulfil one safe rule of conduct—the only one that could be given or obeyed without awakening self-consciousness in her child's mind

—to act when alone exactly as they acted in her presence.

Finding that his constraint only hurt and surprised Ivy, that her welcome was as simply, frankly affectionate, her manner the same sweet compound of shyness and confidence as ever, and reading in her mother's face no sign of coming rebuke to her—bidden as freely as ever to take Ivy walking, riding, or driving wherever it was still seemly that she should go—"and Charlie has no patience with the pony's paces, he is sure to desert you"—Ethert fell back at once into the pleasant ways of former years, pleasanter than ever, because Ivy's mind, opening under the influence of the encouragement she received from him alone, disclosed charms of natural grace, visions wherein maiden fancy mingled strangely with childish ignorance and absolute innocence of evil, that were, even to Ethert, utterly novel and wholly individual. On one well remembered occasion Charlie and Ivy had been indulged with a tour among the Lakes, in part of which Ethert was induced to accompany them ; and on which, almost for the first time, they made the acquaintance of their Aunt, whom they feared and somewhat

avoided, and of Margaret, whom Charlie patronized and Ivy admired, petted, and pitied. Latterly the boy had been often at the Lakes, nominally as Ethert's pupil. If he did not learn as much as his tutor might have wished, at least he never grumbled at the doom which punished his school idleness by requiring him to spend a considerable portion of his holidays under his cousin's instruction. Perhaps his sister did not so cordially approve an arrangement which not only deprived her of her brother's company, but rendered her cousin's visits to Glynnehurst shorter and less frequent.

Their luggage preceded and announced the visitors, and as they approached the house they saw, on a gravelled terrace which crossed the garden at some fifty yards from the entrance, a few feet above the general level, two female figures, both in the light dress and light straw hats that suited the lingering warmth of summer. The face of the elder, so far as it was visible, seemed to Ethert's more discerning and observant eyes somewhat sad, worn, and anxious, and her movements were slow, as if with physical or mental weariness. Much younger than his mother, and

unaffected by the bereavement and lifelong loneliness the latter had endured so firmly, as free from the failing health of her later years, Lady Glynne had about her far more of the languor of an invalid, and if less of severe gravity, more of that kind of depressed melancholy which indicates weakness of character oftener and more distinctly than physical suffering or actual misfortune. By her side, when she first caught sight of the young men, was another slighter, more signally graceful, and more youthful figure.

The fashion of the day, which neither she nor her mother had carried into its straitest ugliness, just served to display the grace and beauty of that slender, delicate, exquisitely-proportioned form. Very young, and looking younger than she was, almost childish, though no one but her mother could have called or thought her still a child, the girl's light summer dress of pure white, relieved only by a broad belt of rose-coloured ribbon and some admixture of the same colour about the throat and arms, her simple head-gear, her long, loose, dark curls, preserving the more natural and far more elegant fashion of an earlier time, confirmed the first impression of extreme

youthfulness suggested by her form and carriage. This impression was in some degree corrected on closer observation by the sweet but somewhat grave character of her face, by a certain pallor, or rather absence of colour, which was not due to lack of health, but natural to her complexion, and by the expressiveness of the dark brown eyes when they were not veiled, through shyness or timidity, by the long black lashes. Faultless in every other feature—the perfect, clearly-pencilled arch of the dark eyebrows, the straight fine nose, the short upper-lip, soft dimpled chin, and beautiful outline of the face, just sufficiently oval to save it from the defect of actual roundness—the only objection a critic of feminine beauty could have taken to her countenance was a similar lack of bright colour in the soft lips, now parted with a smile to greet her approaching relatives.

Charlie sprang forward eagerly to receive his mother's and sister's welcome, meeting the latter as she ran down the terrace steps with a warm but somewhat hasty caress, and passing on to embrace the former, and to enquire after the father, for whom Ethert's remarks had rendered him anxious. Hardly delayed by her brother's greet-

ing, Ivy ran on to meet with equal frankness and freedom—perhaps, though certainly she was not aware of it, with even greater eagerness—the cousin she had not seen for many months, whose plaything she had been in infancy, whose favourite intimate companion in earliest girlhood. There had been no interruption in their acquaintance, no such long absence at the second critical period, when the schoolgirl slowly or suddenly passes into the maiden grown, as might have changed the feeling or the manner of either.

If Ethert's embrace were less close than Charlie's had been, it was less hasty; if he kissed her brow, and not her lips, that had always been his habit, even when he had carried her in his arms over all the rough places in the park where the child might have slipped and soiled her frock or torn her soft dainty palms; and Ivy's smile and spoken greeting were as cordial and free from self-consciousness as those she had bestowed on her brother. When they reached the terrace, Lady Glynne, leaving her son, placed her hand upon her nephew's arm, and allowed her children to precede her towards the house, while she turned and paced the terrace once

or twice with Ethert before she followed them.

“How is my Uncle?” the visitor enquired. “I had not gathered that there was cause for uneasiness, till something Charlie let fall just now made me fear that the attack had been more serious than I was aware.”

“Very serious, I am afraid,” Lady Glynne answered, gravely. “Not for its actual consequences so much as the probability of its recurrence. It was distinctly paralytic in character, and though Sir Charles seemed to have shaken off its effects, Mr. Orme warned me that another might occur almost at any time, and for several weeks past your uncle’s energy and strength have been visibly failing. It was on his account, Ethert, that I pressed you so earnestly to come here, and I wish you could have given us a longer visit. He is always greatly pleased by your company, and this time he has been most anxious to see you : I think partly on business.”

“Business?” her nephew said, somewhat surprised; and turning to her he observed a certain embarrassment in her face, which, while it enhanced his wonder, forbade him to follow up

the subject. "Well, of course if I can be of any service to my uncle I shall be only too glad. But you know, Aunt Caroline, I have now chosen my career, somewhat late perhaps; but I have taken up a regular fixed work, and I am afraid shall have but few opportunities of quitting it. Journalism allows fewer and shorter holidays than most professions, and my post will require very close and assiduous attention."

"I cannot think why you should have accepted such a position," she answered. "It affords no opening to your ambition, no chance, as I understand, of making a name, and less even of interesting or independent work than most newspaper writers appear to find, and surely you might look to something better and more hopeful? What has made you adopt a career that can hardly be to your taste?"

"What determines the choice of most men, I suppose, Aunt. My books did not pay, and this will."

"But the pay must be poor, and while you are not married money cannot be a great object to you, Ethert. I am sure if you are in any difficulty, if you want money at once, it could be arranged

for you, and with your own proved talent and your uncle's interest you could have done very much better than this."

"A man must earn his living, Aunt, for himself, and as kind as my Uncle has always been, and as you are, I should be sorry to wrong Charlie, still more Ivy, of a penny that is rightfully theirs. You will find, when Charlie goes to college, he will want a larger allowance than might suffice young men with smaller expectations, and whatever it is, my Uncle must count on having to pay it at least twice over."

"I am sorry to hear you say so," she answered gravely. "Charlie will have to learn better."

"Nay, Aunt, I never said or thought that he was extravagant, considering his position. But he will find every encouragement to spend, no one disposed to press for payment, and will hardly know what he is spending till experience has forced the fact upon him. You cannot force him to pinch, and it is best to give him no motive for postponing payment, the most expensive of all forms of extravagance."

"He must not do it," she answered, with an

earnestness that under the circumstances seemed somewhat unreasonable. Then, as if conscious of real or apparent exaggeration, she sought to explain. "You know, or you may guess, Ethert, that with his elections, his seat in Parliament, his political subscriptions, and his indisposition to small economies, your uncle has always spent nearly his whole income. It is only of late that we have saved anything, and whatever we can save is due to Ivy. It will be little enough."

"There will be your jointure, Aunt, of course. Besides, I hope and trust my Uncle will live till Charlie comes of age, and then of course a proper settlement can be made on his sister. Charlie is not selfish, and he will be ready enough to do her justice."

"It will not do to trust to that," she answered, evidently much disturbed. "He must learn not to waste money, if only in justice to her. If he really cares either for her or me he must prove it by abstaining from waste or debts which will hamper him fatally in the future. By the way," she said, breaking off a subject on which she seemed impelled to say more than she could

explain or justify, "you know Mr. Brand—I mean personally? Of course you know him as your Uncle's solicitor?"

"My Uncle introduced me to him in London some years ago, when I was eating my way to the Bar. He was very kind, and very willing to have helped me forward, but he was less surprised, or less willing to express his surprise, than I expected when I gave up the idea of becoming a lawyer in earnest."

"Well, you will meet him here to-morrow; he is our only other guest at present. Strangers worry and fatigue your Uncle too much."

Ethert did not see Sir Charles Glynne till the party assembled in the drawing-room before dinner, and was then struck by the manifest change that had come over the old man since they last met, a change which to him appeared fully to justify Lady Glynne's apprehensions. The baronet listened with less attention and cheerfulness than usual to Charley's chatter, and seemed needlessly impatient of little errors or delays, of which indeed there were few, Lady Glynne's household management being as good and strict as her gentle and rather languid temper per-

mitted. She, and still more her daughter, were, thought Ethert, more than usually timid and silent. Ivy had always been most shy and reserved in her father's presence, not understanding perhaps, at any rate afraid of him ; and now, on any little *contretemps* in conversation or otherwise, however trivial, she looked towards him almost furtively with a frightened glance, as if she expected to be scolded herself, or to hear such an outbreak as, though directed against another, might disturb her comfort or her mother's.

"I am sorry," said Sir Charles, when the ladies left them, "that Charlie has taken to smoking already, in spite of all I could say. I would not listen to advice on the subject, and I suppose he is right, or it serves me right that he disregards my warning. But no lad can begin that vice before he is one-and-twenty without having cause to repent it. However, it is as well that politeness will not deprive you of your cigar, as I cannot enjoy it in your company ; will you smoke in his den or on the terrace, as I know you will not take any more wine?"

"My cigar is not a pressing necessity as with

some men, Uncle; I can put it off indefinitely if my company would be agreeable to you."

"Thank you, Ethert," said the baronet, with more of real cordiality in his tone than was usual even when his kindness to his nephew had been most substantial, "but I am sleepy now after dinner, and what talk I want with you may wait till to-morrow. Cannot you stay a while longer with us?"

"Impossible, I am sorry to say. I have made my engagement, and am bound to take up my work on Monday evening."

"Ay, I remember; Ethert, it was a stupid thing for you to do."

"I don't think so, Uncle."

"Well, well, we won't discuss it now. Charlie, take this key; get out some of my regalias; but mind, don't smoke more than one yourself, they'll do you nothing but harm. Mind, Ethert," as his son left the room shrugging his shoulders, "the reason I gave Charlie is the real one. I have ten times as many of those old regalias as I shall ever smoke now, and if you don't smoke them here I shall send half of them to your London address."

His Uncle had been commonly less given to small courtesies and kindnesses of this kind, involving personal thoughtfulness, than to more serious favours; and there was something in the old man's manner, as well as in the words which, lightly as they were spoken, implied a conscious abandonment of many of life's pleasures and interests, that touched one who, if he could not greatly respect his relative's character, was sincerely grateful for goodwill shown and kindness rendered to himself.

"What do you think of the governor?" said Charlie, as they reached the terrace.

"I think," answered Ethert, reluctantly, "more and more what I told you. You had better not go up to Oxford yet, if you can possibly help it."

"Do you think so?" said Charlie, seriously disturbed. "I hope not, but Mamma looks very grave indeed, and even Ivy is frightened about something; I wish I knew what. Why, I declare, there she is! and she has put on her hat and scarf. She meant to catch us here—or you, Ethert. I fancy she'll talk to you more than to me. She thinks me giddy; perhaps I am when

there's nothing special to sober me. I think I will leave you presently—not just yet, or she will feel that she has driven me away. Well, Ivy, do you want a cigarette? Or if you will go for it in earnest, ask Ethert for one of the governor's regalias. He wouldn't allow me a second."

Ivy had smiled with natural brightness and liveliness at her brother's first saucy word; the reference to her father clouded her sweet face at once.

"I am afraid Papa has ceased to enjoy them. It is not only that Mr. Orme objects—he doesn't seem to care. The doctor said one after breakfast and dinner would not hurt him, but I go into the library twice a day to seal and direct his letters—Mamma has given that up to me—and I generally see the cigar lying beside him half smoked or not lighted. Ethert, you are not putting down yours? You know if you do that it is sending me away."

"I did not remember, Ivy. The truth is, I never learned to smoke in a lady's presence, except yours."

"What!" she answered, smiling, "not in Meta's? I cannot imagine that any one would

venture to *think* of a cigar in Aunt Flora's presence. But surely in your long walks and sails with Meta you are not so punctilious?"

"Yes, he is, though, Ivy," answered her brother; "unless it be affected to keep me in order. I never saw him take out his pipe when she was by, and I have seen him put it out half a dozen times when she joined us."

"Really?" enquired Ivy, much amused. "Ethert, are you really more polite to her than to me?"

"If it is a point of politeness," he answered, again laying his cigar on the low wall of the terrace, "I must postpone the indulgence now."

"Nonsense, Ethert," she answered, half-eagerly, half-laughing, taking up the regalia herself, and forcing it between his lips with perfect sisterly playfulness, "only I wonder that you should so flatter—shall I say Meta or myself?"

"Whichever you please, my little cousin! The difference is simply this. You have been, since you were a baby, almost my sister, and Meta is nothing of the kind."

“No?” she said; “what then?”

“That I cannot tell you, Ivy; but so much or so little that I think it best to err on the side of treating her too little, perhaps, as a child. Mind, she has no brother to teach her to expect men to smoke in her presence, as you have.”

“Charlie,” she answered, laughing, “gave me to understand that I must endure his cigar or dispense with his company.”

“It is too bad, Ivy, to tell tales out of school in this way. But you always did so. How many times did you make Ethert thrash me for bullying you? Now I don’t mean to be bullied any more, certainly not out of my cigar. I shall go where I may smoke in peace.”

She let him depart without even a playful remonstrance. As soon as he was out of hearing, she turned gravely and earnestly to her cousin, pressing, to demand his attention, the arm on which she had placed her slender, ungloved fingers.

“Ethert, can you not tell me what is the matter here? Even Mamma will not trust me; she forgets that I am no child now. But you will; you will tell me what it is?”

“Surely you know, Ivy? You must have seen so much as to know more than I had guessed till I saw your mother this afternoon. Your father’s illness was a serious one; the attack may return, and might be——” he paused, but Ivy had understood him fully.

“I know,” she said, “and that is bad enough. But I have realised that for some time now. That is not all, Ethert. There is some mystery, some trouble besides, something I think that depends upon that, which I don’t understand. Mamma seems so troubled and anxious, and has let fall words as if *that* meant some terrible change beyond, to herself and me, perhaps to Charlie. What can it mean?”

“I don’t know, *ma petite*. I don’t think it can mean much, beyond what you know. My Aunt does not fully appreciate Charlie, and no doubt he is very young, and perhaps a little heedless, to be the head of a family, the owner of so great a property. But she is safe, and even if no proper provision has yet been made for you, I think you will agree with me that Charlie may be trusted to do you justice.”

“Of course,” she answered, half-indignantly.

“But Mamma would know that. There must be something more.”

“I think not. I don’t see what there can be. My Uncle has been more explicit with me than most men would be under the circumstances, and I know he can hardly be embarrassed. Your mother is naturally nervous and very anxious, and no doubt her fears for your father have made her more susceptible just now.”

“Then, Ethert, *do* talk to her and set her mind at rest. I cannot. She has never spoken to me at all about business or about family concerns; but do tell her that there is nothing to fear, if you know it is so; and if it is for me she is fretting, tell her I am sure Charlie will be just to me, but if he were not, I should be far more hurt by the unkindness than by any injury he could do me. And do—can you not?—make her remember that I am old enough to be trusted, to be a comfort to her if she would only trust me.”

“I am sure you would, dear child, the greatest comfort; and depend upon it in real trouble she will turn to you and find it so. But while it is only fearing what can neither be helped nor delayed, what may or may not come, I daresay

she feels loth to talk about it even to you."

"I don't know," Ivy replied, sadly. "You will see, Ethert. I am so glad you are here; but I cannot help thinking there is something more. You see I am not clever—not as clever even as your little Meta. I read and like your books because they are yours, and now and then I find something in them that reminds me of you, of things you have said and done; and particularly when you write of children, it reminds me of the days we have spent together, of all your kindness to Charlie and me, and still more perhaps of her; but I cannot understand or follow your thoughts as she does. I am so dull."

"But you are good and sensible, my dear Ivy; and even were you not so much older than Meta, you have a temper, a consideration for others, a gentleness and a quiet good sense of your own, which after all do more for women, and especially do more to make you a comfort to others in trouble, than any talent can do."

"Do you really think so? Or do you say it to please me, to console me?" Her eyes brightened,

her cheek flushed a little, and a slight change of tone and bearing showed how much she was comforted and gratified by her cousin's praise, even if she were not quite confident in its sincerity. "You see, Ethert, when I read your books I always think: 'His ladies are so clever; even his young girls are as clever as men. How stupid, how dull a companion he must think me!'"

"I never found you so, *ma petite*," he answered, amused and touched at once. "You are a severe critic, dear child. Only one or two of my critics in print have hit on the blot that seems so palpable to you."

"Ethert, you know I did not mean that; I could not pretend to find fault, and it would be very impertinent if I did. But I do so wish I had been clever, could understand all those clever things I read in books or hear Papa's friends talk with him."

"It is not cleverness, dear, that you want. The men you think of are concerned with things you do not happen to know anything about. But in their way they are no cleverer, though they are

Ministers or Members of Parliament, than those you might meet every day here or in London, and would understand perfectly because they would speak on subjects you happened to comprehend."

"You are very kind, Ethert, but it won't do. Ever since I saw Meta and heard her talk to you, I have understood what a difference there is between us. She is three years at least younger than I, but she is ten years quicker and better read."

"Perhaps that is because I have chosen her books, and she has had less of amusement and interest from other sources than you."

"I wish, then, you would find me books that I can understand; that would tell me about the things you say I do not know. Will you not?"

"I don't think I should care to make a female politician of you, dear child. I like you far too well as you are, my little cousin, to change you in any way."

Touched by the half-tearful eyes, the wistful expression of her countenance, he stooped and kissed her forehead.

“Now, *ma petite*, I had better take you in. I have finished my cigar ; and your mother will think me inattentive to her, as well as forgetful of you, if I keep you out longer in the night air, and with this heavy dew falling.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST ALARM.

THE proposed conversation between Sir Charles and his nephew was again postponed next morning. Mr. Brand had arrived late the night before and spent the greater part of the day with his client, insisting on the necessity of his return to town that evening.

“Ethert,” said his Aunt, after breakfast, “I know you don’t care much for riding across country; I am sure I don’t wonder; but Charlie will go out to-day, and he has got his father to let him ride that fiery chestnut. I wish you were going with him, unless you can persuade him to leave Prince Rupert in the stable.”

“He won’t do that, Aunt. But of course I will go out if it will be any relief to you. Not that I should be of use. Charlie is a far better rider than myself, and knows it.”

As, booted and spurred for riding, Ethert passed through the garden, he was intercepted by Ivy.

“Are you going to ride?” she said, “Will you not take me with you? Mamma wants me to call on the Vavasours; and I am so afraid of them, I put it off till you would go with me. Mamma contrives to excuse herself very much from going out now; it is hard on me, and Charlie is no help, or very little. He has nothing to say, and he is as much afraid of Miss Vavasour as I am.”

“I am very sorry, dearest, but I promised your mother to go out with Charlie, to see whether he breaks his neck or Prince Rupert’s back; not that I could prevent him from doing either.”

“Then I shall see nothing of you,” she said. “I did think we might have one ride or walk together, if you really must go on Monday.”

“Will it not do,” he asked, looking into her face and touched as well as flattered by its expression of affectionate disappointment, “if I engage to take you to Church to-morrow? We can walk if it is fine, and coming back—well, I suppose we may be allowed to make a round-about return through the fields?”

“Allowed ? I suppose so !” she answered. “What do you mean ? But you always avoid Church, Ethert, I know—unless you think that self-sacrifice must always be meritorious.”

“I am afraid,” he replied, laughing, “I could not plead any such excuse. An hour’s walk with you will make up for two of Dr. Whympers droning. Since you and Miss Vavasour took the choir in hand, it don’t set one’s teeth on edge quite as it used to do.”

The ride was prolonged, so that the two young men did not return till late, though no accident occurred to justify Lady Glynne’s anxiety. Ethert, however, noticed how hard his cousin’s steed pulled, how uncontrollably he was wont to rush at his fences, and spoke a word or two of serious warning, which had as much effect as such counsels from their elders commonly have on spirited lads of Charlie’s age. As they came in, Mr. Brand the solicitor was about to start.

“Mr. Ethert,” he said, “I am glad to have caught you. Can you spare an hour to walk down with me to the station ? I have time to walk if you will give me your company.”

“With pleasure,” said Ethert, very insincerely ;

for, besides that he was tired, he would decidedly have preferred the company of his aunt and cousin to that of the kindly and well-meaning but not very interesting lawyer. Something, however, in the tone and manner of the latter, and the half-conscious anxiety inspired by Ivy's questionings and his Aunt's peculiar observations, made him feel that the request was not one to be refused. Yet at first it seemed as if the lawyer had nothing important to say, or did not know how to begin. He had entered on more than one topic and dropped it somewhat awkwardly, before a political observation afforded him an opportunity of asking:—

“I suppose a seat in Parliament is the height of your present ambition, though it might be only a step to a much higher one?”

“I dream of such a thing, but hardly as a practical possibility, for some day twenty years hence or more, when I may have made a name and Parliament may no longer require a fortune.”

“It would cost you very little to get in for Stapleton, if your Uncle should withdraw or resign the seat, as he soon must.”

“Perhaps not. Sir Charles’s influence is very great there, I know; but I have no reason to think that he would exert it in my favour. And if he did, Mr. Brand, you are surely aware that I could not afford the other expenses of the costliest of all luxuries—political ambition; nor have I time to work as a man must work who means to get on in Parliament. For years at least he should do nothing else, and I have my bread to earn.”

“I don’t know that you need,” remarked the other. “If anything happened to Charles, you are of course your Uncle’s heir.”

“Heir to the title, not the estates. For which reason, if for no other, I sincerely hope Charlie will survive me.”

“Your Uncle,” observed the lawyer, “would be glad, I fancy, to do something for you; and at any rate there is one course which might reconcile all interests and avoid all difficulties, while fully gratifying your ambition. Why don’t you marry your cousin?”

This was not the first occasion on which Ethert had observed Mr. Brand’s peculiar method of introducing a startling idea. What must amaze

and might offend he would state with such absolute abruptness, such nonchalant coolness, that the hearer was too utterly astounded to express either surprise or anger, and generally committed himself by an effort to imitate the other's matter-of-course tone and premeditated indifference. But Ethert was too completely confounded to speak at all until a silence, lasting full two minutes, had given him leisure to realise first the audacious impertinence of the advice, and next the certainty that such impertinence had not been idly ventured.

"There are several reasons," he said, when he found voice to answer, "but one is sufficient. I don't wish Sir Charles to kick me down stairs, or my Aunt to forbid my further intercourse with a cousin I greatly respect and esteem."

"And who would make you a very good wife," said the other, as coolly as before.

"A wife whom any man might be proud to win. But, while I would never marry money to be accused of marrying for money, I should presume that my cousin could as little afford to accept a penniless suitor as I to marry a lady

brought up as she has been; or indeed to marry at all."

"No other, perhaps; but for his nephew and possible heir there are things Sir Charles might be able to arrange, which it would be difficult, if not impossible, to do for a stranger."

"Mr. Brand," said Ethert, stopping and looking his companion full in the face, "if you were not my Uncle's solicitor I should treat your suggestion as a simple impertinence. Being his solicitor, if I did not know something of your relations with him, I should think it even worse. I must suppose you think you have a right so to speak. I decline to believe that you are really warranted in such a suggestion."

"Ask Sir Charles for his daughter's hand," replied the lawyer, coolly, "and if no arrangement that will render your marriage possible and convenient, even in your eyes, be proposed to you, come and see me. Otherwise, as you must be aware, I can say no more."

"I have no wish to hear any more; except that I am fond of my cousin, and should be sorry to think that she was likely to meet with less than justice from her father or brother, as

her mother seemed to fear. For the rest, neither ambition, nor fortune, nor even regard for her would induce me to be guilty of the presumption you suggest."

Mr. Brand made no rejoinder, and presently turned the conversation; nor was another word said on the subject before they parted.

After dinner Sir Charles invited his nephew to smoke a cigar in his own study. Taking one himself, but laying it aside after a few whiffs, he said:—

"I hope, Ethert, you will find reason to give up the strange fancy you have adopted. Journalism is not a profession that pays well either in honour or in money; and I had rather, if it pinched me, give you out of my own pocket what you expect to earn till we can find you something better in both respects. But if that won't do, this at least you cannot refuse to accept, for it would be a convenience to both. I cannot at present give up my chambers in Victoria Street, and shall not want them again till spring, if ever—which is not likely. They are larger of course than you want. Lady Glynn has stayed there with me, and even

Ivy—of course it was a crush to get her in. But I must keep them up, and I must pay the wages and board of Edwards and his wife. He is a good valet and she a capital cook, and you can live there rent free at no greater cost than in lodgings. I don't want them left empty so long; it would really suit me best that you should occupy them."

It was evident that the old man was thoroughly in earnest, and Ethert felt it would be ungracious to refuse an offer so kindly intended and one that imposed no serious obligation. He accepted it therefore with simple courteous thanks, and this acceptance seemed to encourage Sir Charles and loosen his somewhat fettered tongue or embarrassed mind.

"You are ambitious, Ethert," he said, after a while; "and you have, I think, the brains, certainly the industry, to get on in any career. I should like to see you adopt that which would give you the highest field and the best rewards. I should have applied for the Chiltern Hundreds three months ago but for two reasons; first on party grounds, next that I have thought how the vacancy might be filled. I can never sit

again. Would it suit you to come forward in our interest for Stapleton? It shall cost you nothing."

Despite the recent conversation with the solicitor, Ethert was a second time taken by surprise. The offer was the most tempting that could have been made to him. An eager politician, by temperament an orator rather than a writer—the distinction between the poet and the orator is often little more than an accident of early training—ambitious, self-confident, he had seen enough of Parliamentary life from the Gallery to excite, not sober, his imagination. It was in the last degree imprudent to accept; and yet, unmarried, unencumbered, unpledged—why should he not? If he failed, he could surely secure, as the price of retirement, a position better than he could earn in any other way. Such were his first thoughts; then, the suggestion which the lawyer had coupled with this recurring to his mind, he fell back at once into the mental attitude of a fencer on guard, and replied with a cold reserve whose motive his uncle could hardly misconceive, if he had any idea what had passed that afternoon:

“My professional work will fill my hands, and though a seat in Parliament would be intensely gratifying to my ambition, I cannot possibly afford it.”

Sir Charles hesitated more and more as he seemed to approach a subject yet more important, but much more difficult even to hint at, clearly not accepting as yet his nephew's refusal.

“Ethert, it is useless to conceal and unmanly to avoid plain facts. I know, and you cannot but guess, that I shall not last much longer. None of our house are long-lived—many die young, and if anything happen to Charlie you inherit the title, which from your point of view would be simply a burden.”

“A terrible burden, uncle, and one which I sincerely hope may never fall upon me. I trust you will wear it longer than you think, and if Prince Rupert does not break his neck, Charlie has every chance of outliving me by ten or twenty years. God send he may!”

“Charlie is not wise, and is younger even than his years. I cannot but wish to see all things settled whilst I live—the future of all provided

for, yourself as well as your cousins; for, Ethert, I think you can believe I do like you?"

"You have been as kind to me as a father," said Ethert, much moved, and not very careful to keep the expression of his genuine gratitude and affection within the exact limits of accuracy. "I can take care of myself, Uncle; and for Ivy, I trust that Charlie will do full justice to her, if you have not been able to do so."

"There lies my worst anxiety," the old baronet answered, looking with troubled eyes for a moment into his nephew's face, and then letting his glance sink again. "She is not clever, Ethert, but she is good and kind, and will make a good wife to any man who has sense and kindness to take good care of her. I would rather see her married to one who had talent and character, if he had nothing else, than to a man of even higher fortune and station than my own, and above all I would rather see her safely married while I live than leave her to the chance of the most brilliant fortune afterwards."

"If you think fit," said Ethert, parrying the thrust he felt to be intended, "to make me one of her guardians, you may be very sure I will do

my part by Ivy as loyally and anxiously as I would by a sister of my own."

"Ethert, I cannot provide for you both—separately—and you know it is by no means unlikely that the title should come to you; the estates are entailed."

He paused, and Ethert still resolutely avoiding all recognition of the hint, pointed as it had been, and speaking only of his own future as sufficiently assured, his uncle sighed and let the subject drop.

"I told you," said Lady Glynne, after her nephew had returned to town. "I told you, Charles, that you were taking the wrong line. Tell Ethert the truth, tell him that Ivy's only chance of safety and honour is in marrying him, and liking for her and gratitude to you, and what young men call chivalry, may very probably induce him to—to consent. Put to him what he must regard as a proposal to marry for money—what he must see will appear to everyone else as well as to himself in that light—and he cannot for very shame."

"Do you really think, Caroline, that all that is anything more than talk? Some men want a

more decent pretext than others for making a prudent and selfish marriage, and I gave him excuse enough. But tell him that it is *not* his interest, that the estates as well as the title are really his—what should he marry Ivy for, who may have his choice, if he cares to marry at all, among the rank and beauty of London society?”

“You don’t understand him, Charles. You have failed, and Brand tells you his hint, which seems to have been plain enough, was even indignantly rejected. Remember, the secret will be kept only whilst you live; when it comes out it will be too late. Tell Ethert, put it to him as the only means to save the family from scandal, and Ivy and myself from disgrace, and—very likely he may refuse, he has a right to do so—but that is the only chance.”

“Bah!” said Sir Charles, “I don’t at all despair of his proposing to Ivy the next time he sees her.”

“I wish you had seen what I have,” his wife replied, sadly and earnestly. “When he came here he greeted her as he had always done—too much like a brother, of course, but kindly and

affectionately ; and Ivy brightened, was happier, more lively than she had been since your illness. He was as fond of her company, as frank in showing his affection and kindness for her as before, till after he had talked with Brand and you. I thought there was something cold and constrained in the way he wished her good night that evening, but it might be fancy. Next morning she reminded him that he had promised to take her to Church. He tried to get out of it, and when he saw that it hurt her he first tried to persuade me to go, and afterwards fairly bullied Charlie into it. He was determined that day not to be again alone with her. That evening his manner had evidently saddened and perplexed her ; she cares more for him than she knows. Our plan would be no sacrifice to her. But she rallied after dinner, when he evidently made an effort to talk to her naturally and as usual in the drawing-room, till he gave her her candle and bade her good night in the same careful, measured manner, as if he dared not be natural ; and when next morning he parted from her again without offering to kiss her—I don't think such a thing had happened since she was born—she, knowing they

would not meet again for months, was so hurt, wondering what she could have done to displease him—I am sure he saw it, and if he had not made up his mind to avoid her, not felt that you had put a fatal constraint between them, he could not have done it. Well, you have had your way this time. Wait, if you will, and see what follows; but if another and a last chance is given us, remember that you have failed, and try my plan. It can do no harm then; for remember, Charles, the secret cannot and will not be kept when once his right becomes practical and present. You have been fairly warned of that. I cannot say that Brand is wrong; it would be making himself a party to a fraud, and if Brand did not betray it you know who certainly would.”

“Not he,” said her husband, hard as he was evidently avoiding to look in her face, into which a painful flush had come as she spoke the last words. “It is not his interest, and malicious as he is he cares more for money than for malice.”

CHAPTER VII.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

I WAS surprised and well pleased to receive, in an envelope bearing the stamp of the *Courier*, a thoroughly legible letter ; and I suppose that most of my colleagues blessed the fortune which had obliged or induced Lestrangle to, as Leaf said, “ set up a private secretary who had learnt to write, and was not journalist enough to have unlearned the art.” The formal commencement, suited to Glynné’s position, and aptly fitted to the variety of topics he had to treat on Lestrangle’s behalf, had evidently been well considered :—

“I am instructed to ask your attention to several matters of more or less importance. ‘Will you be good enough to make a point of attending our meetings on Friday afternoon? Please consider whether ‘Christian Effeminacy’ had not

better be given to Vere. Would it not be best answered by a thorough believer? Except during a Presidential election, the American correspondence and articles should be kept within some three columns per week at most. Can you take up the Copyright debate? It begins on Tuesday next, and will probably be adjourned. Government will be asked to give a day. If they consent it will be on Monday or Thursday of the next week—next Thursday is engaged. Lestrangle agrees with you that as a rule it is absurd to make a point of reviewing important books before you have time to read them; but for the first year of the *Courier's* new existence begs you to prefer promptitude to thoroughness. Please hint to our New York correspondent that he is too strong a Southern partisan, now the Civil War is forgotten here. Can you explain in a half-column leader the whole history of the Virginia debt?" and so on, and so on.

"Yours truly,

"ETHERT GLYNNE."

At three on the next Friday afternoon I joined for the first time the informal assemblage of the

leading members of Lestrangle's staff. We gathered in a sort of common room, bare enough of other furniture than bookshelves, table, writing and a few lounging chairs, spittoons, cigar boxes, pipes, and so forth. The older among us for the most part refused other beverage than coffee at that hour. One or two veterans who had by force of original constitutional strength outlived scores of their colleagues of similar habits, and some of our younger friends, prided themselves a little on an "athletic" preference for ale or brandy and soda. Among these I was glad for his sake to observe was not Glynne, who sat next to the head of the table, immediately on the left of our chief. The latter lounged, or perhaps it would be more just to say reclined, in an easy chair, his appearance more than confirming my apprehensions for his health. Of quite average height, he was, I should think, the lightest weight of the party; wasted almost to a skeleton, with thin long white hands and face almost equally pale, rendering the contrast of his dark eager eyes, except when weariness or indifference dimmed their fire, very striking and almost startling. His long loose hair was not actually white, but much more than

grey, and his long beard was almost equally divided between streaks of black and silver. His restrained impatience, the difficulty with which he refrained from interrupting or hurrying a slow speaker or cutting short an irrelevant or inappropriate argument, were marked by a certain quivering of the under-lip, and now and then an almost irritable beating of his right hand on the table. As a colleague and equal he had been too prone to hasty interruption, especially when he thought himself imperfectly comprehended, or was irritated by the slow expression of views he could himself have summed up in half a sentence. He recognised as a chief the imperative necessity of self-control ; not merely out of courtesy, but because he fully appreciated the importance of eliciting full and free discussion and unbiassed criticism.

Next him on the right sat Leaf, by far the best informed, coolest, most reliable among us seldom or never wrong on a point of fact, never ungrammatical or incorrect, but apt to be brief and bald in utterance, especially on paper : the only journalist I ever knew who felt a difficulty in expanding his thoughts to the full space of the prescribed column.

Opposite him, next to Glynne, sat Everett, in charge of the Indian and Colonial Department, a large, tall, powerful, and rather heavy-looking man; quiet and a little slow in speech; somewhat impetuous as a writer. Half his life had been spent out of England, and his knowledge, though geographically limited, was practical and varied within the range of his experience beyond that of most adventurers in journalism.

Beside him was a man much younger, and looking younger than he was; a soldier by education, a war-correspondent of no mean distinction for several years; to whom Lestrangle looked for accurate information and effective criticism on military and naval administration; somewhat too partial, perhaps, to inventors, certainly too bitter and arrogant in his criticism on the action of responsible commanders in the field and at home; but possessing one rare merit, that his criticisms were not governed by popular clamour or practical results. He could do as full justice to a soldier who had failed in an impossible task as to one who had succeeded brilliantly in a feat more easy than it appeared. The wing-like continuation of his moustache—

the one martial affectation in his attire or appearance—constantly caught and teased my eye, especially when a draught of air blew the wide, thin stream of hair backwards and forwards, and presented an effect at which I found it difficult not actually to smile.

At the further end of the table, besides some junior personages, whose duties answered to those of the general-utility performer on the stage, were two gentlemen who filled posts of extreme if not always fully-acknowledged importance. The chief of our reporting staff had for thirty years written the best Parliamentary summary in London, and knew, perhaps, as much of the rules and practice of Parliament as Mr. Speaker himself. He had supplied sense and grammar to a whole generation of self-esteemed statesmen and would-be orators, but had for himself little to say, and generally said that little ill.

Next him sat the experienced, careful, silent, somewhat irritable sub-editor—wiry, enduring strength the most notable characteristic of his physique; who played on the newspaper the same part which the Financial Secretary of the Treasury plays in the Commons; who must

come early and stay till the very last, must fill up and fit in everything, do everything that was nobody else's especial duty, and everything that those whose duty it was might have failed in or forgotten; who got less credit, less notice than any of his co-operators, save from our chief, but on whom, next to our chief, more depended than on anyone. He was wont to say that "a newspaper killed an editor every twelve years, a sub-editor every six," and that he himself had survived three successions of those who filled similar posts in London journalism.

Glynne was remarkable only as the most thoroughly gentlemanlike in manner and appearance of the whole staff, the one man whom no journalist would have picked out as an aristocrat, no man of the world as belonging to a profession in which affectations and eccentricities have a traditional licence. Certainly the best dressed of the party except the soldier, he was the one man whose dress could by no possibility attract notice. When we were all assembled, Lestrangle first lighted his own huge cheroot as a sort of invitation to us, and passed the boxes around the table.

“This,” he said, “is the first time we have all met, and I may perhaps as well repeat what I said at our first meeting. The organisation of the *Courier* is Cleveland’s, not mine; but the plan is one in which I heartily agree. In giving each department into a single hand, in leaving to each principal the charge, not merely of leaders on his own subject, but of all the correspondence and information that bear upon it, we have made a complete innovation on newspaper practice. It is for us so to co-operate that innovation may for once be improvement. It is not less but more necessary that the chief of such a cabinet should be not a constitutional prime minister, but a despotic sovereign. I assume I shall be wrong in half my decisions, but that doesn’t matter. Somebody must decide; and on a newspaper it is a trifle to be wrong, it is fatal to be slow or irresolute. One great difficulty in all cases is to keep writers who have all minds and views of their own from contradicting one another more or less directly; to adhere to a common policy, a common set of ideas—the ideas not of individuals, nor even of the Editor, but of the newspaper.

“For example, Everett must bear in mind that our course in regard to Colonial marriage legislation must be governed, not by Colonial, but by English considerations. This question has to be treated next week, and I think it may be well to hear other opinions on it than my own. I don't see how a Conservative journal can do otherwise than defend the existing law; but that law may be defended on two entirely different grounds, and we must choose ours. Are we to affirm that marriages of affinity are un-Christian, and should therefore be forbidden in a Christian land; or, avoiding to assume either that the country is Christian or the marriages are not, to rest simply on social necessity and the certainty that one infraction of the principle must speedily sweep away affinity altogether?”

Leaf, that very *rara avis* in modern journalism, a man thoroughly orthodox in divinity, not merely for want of thought, but as the result of thought, spoke a few earnest, almost indignant, sentences in support of the former view. Everett denounced the practical injustice of interference with personal liberty on merely theoretical grounds; and then our chief

called upon myself, probably as the strongest supporter of the strictest doctrine for the laxest reasons.

“I see,” said I, “no direct reasons why a widower should not marry his sister-in-law. I think it an intolerable evil that a wife should look on her sister as her possible successor. The advocates of change argue as if we had only to consider the widower’s case, and this proves them thoroughly disingenuous. For one family in which the aunt is a desirable step-mother, there are twenty in which the brother-in-law is the best or the only guardian. For the sake of a hundred second marriages, you would make ten thousand first marriages uncomfortable, deprive a thousand young girls of their only home, and soil the whole idea of English family life. The impossibility of marriage is the safeguard of domestic affection : it extinguishes desire. Except among the savages who haunt the moral outskirts of civilization, forbidden unions are the rarest of all crimes.”

“Ay,” said Lestrangle. “But *these* marriages are just frequent enough to take from the sister-in-law both social and moral security.”

“A poor reason,” I retorted, “for altering the law to suit and reward the law-breakers who have deprived us of its benefits. And that is not all. Infringe the principle of affinity at one point, and it must be swept away altogether. At present most men regard a sister-in-law—all men, I suppose, except Lord Granville, a step-daughter or a wife’s niece—precisely as a sister, child, or niece of their own. What a revolution in domestic life, what an inroad on social intercourse and social morality, if the wife’s relations are henceforth to be strangers to the husband, and his to her! For the sake of home comfort and social peace and purity, religion altogether apart, I would resist to the death the first step to such a change. And if the present law be ineffective to secure its end, strengthen instead of destroying it—punish forbidden marriages like other crimes.”

After some further debate Lestrangle summed up.

“We must take your line, I think,” he said to me; “and you had best take it yourself. Only write from your brain, not from your heart, not as if every opponent were a Republican, an anti-

vivisectionist, or a teetotaller. And now for a subject of more general and, except for you, more exciting interest. What of the General Election evidently at hand? It won't do to *say* that we shall be beaten. Now-a-days nothing succeeds like success; the Democracy have not, as the upper and middle classes always had, loyalty and pluck to fight a losing battle; they desert by thousands to the luckier colours."

If I remember rightly, every second person present expressed an opinion of his own entirely different from that of every one else; and held to it with an obstinacy the more remarkable that none of us could give a tangible reason, drawn from real valuable knowledge of any society outside of London and its suburbs. Lestrangle turned to his secretary, who had remained silent.

"And what do you think, Glynne?"

"I know nothing," Glynne answered. "But I have not been in London for some years, and it seems to me that you all take London for England. London thought may be, and probably is sounder than that of any provincial society; certainly less prejudiced, less narrow, formed on wider knowledge, far larger and more general opportunities of

intercourse with men of all views and characters. But it is the provinces, not London, that decide a general election ; and in the north, speaking as a Westmoreland man not wholly unacquainted with Lancashire, I think we shall lose heavily. But this is only an impression, derived I don't know how in the absence of anything like personal experience, and may be worth nothing."

"I think," said Lestrangle, "it is worth more than any of ours, for the one reason you give ; and unhappily Cleveland agrees with you. The probability is always against us, because we are right and the majority is generally wrong. I should think ill of my political creed if it were that of the multitude. Moreover, I can never take our present Prime Minister seriously."

"His enemies don't agree with you," said Leaf.

"I suppose not, or they would not be so rabid. I don't like to imitate their arrogance. There is something almost too contemptible for anger, almost too irritating for contempt, in the sublime conceit of third-rate magazine-writers, who set down 'the Duke's' dislike of reform to 'blind prejudice,' and second-rate professors who habitu-

ally speak of the universities, that is of the *élite* of English intellect, as 'always wrong,' because scholars and thinkers presume to differ from Beesleys and Dilkes. It is still more offensive, if not quite so silly, to talk of a constituency 'disgracing itself' by daring to prefer a Tory gentleman to a brawling demagogue. But I shall not be surprised if in this case the constituencies do in some sense disgrace themselves. It will not be honourable to England if we are beaten."

"And why?" asked Ethert.

"Because, if it be so, this will be the first great contest in English history since the Revolution which has been carried simply by hard lying. I suppose I must not say so in print?"

"I should think not," said Leaf, the only one among us who felt sufficiently on equal terms with our chief to exercise that kind of friendly control of which all knew, and none better than himself, that Lestrangle sometimes stood in need.

"No, I suppose not. But this I will do. I will show that their leaders have made such charges, used such language as should exclude either themselves or those they assail from the society of gentlemen."

“What do you mean,” asked Everett, “by saying that you cannot take the Prime Minister seriously?”

“Well, is he not a practical joke? Does not Vivian Grey feel himself a living sarcasm, an incarnate piece of irony?—he who believes in nothing except the superiority of the Semite races, who had ridiculed Conservatism at large and everything Conservatives most cherish except the monarchy—the chief of the Conservative party, the representative of English Imperial pride and national self-will; he, the cosmopolitan by birth and temper, the exponent of the most John Bullish phase of John Bull feeling! Is he ever in earnest when he addresses himself directly to Parliament or to the public? For my part, I believe that his politics are a fiction, and that his fictions represent all that is real in his politics, and that is but skin deep.”

“I think,” said Leaf, somewhat indignantly, “he is a sounder and better man than his rival.”

“I agree with you; the one is a hypocrite, the other only a humbug. Well, I must write the election articles myself; but, Leaf, will you be

good enough to look them over? They should not embody one man's views or reflect one man's temper."

Another council of the same kind held a few weeks later was disturbed in a manner which left its impression on the mind of more than one among us. Lestrangle had forbidden interruption, except on very grave occasion, during these councils, and we were a little surprised when the office-messenger entered, saying that Mr. Glynne's presence was urgently requested by a Mr. Brand. He did not return till we were on the point of breaking up; then entered somewhat hastily, with a face in which surprise, distress, and even horror were painfully manifest, and handed to his chief an open telegram.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Lestrangle, with a sympathy so earnest as, to those who knew him, to imply either a very serious and startling misfortune, or a liking for his young assistant such as he had seldom shown for old and steady friends. "Well, there is no help for it; of course you must go."

"I need not go yet. Mr. Brand, my uncle's

solicitor, is going down at once ; but I must be there for the funeral, and probably the day before, and I am afraid I shall have some difficulty in getting back at once. How long can you spare me?"

"I will spare you as long as you think it right to stay. I can trust you, Glynne, not to under-estimate the binding character of professional obligations like yours. Stay while you are more wanted there than here; only let me know as soon as you can exactly what I am to expect. Will not this," he continued, when they were left alone together, "deprive me altogether of your services? Of course it must greatly change your position?"

"Not at all, so far as I know," Ethert answered, "except for the worse. The estates are entailed on Sir Charles's daughter, now his only surviving child. I am afraid the shock to my uncle will prove even more serious than this telegram suggests, and in that case I shall be burdened with a baronetcy without the slightest means of supporting it. Please don't let anything get out; if so, I shall drop the title as absolutely as my acquaintances and my enemies will permit. I am terribly distressed about this

in every way," he went on, after a short pause, speaking with manifest emotion. "Charlie was a capital fellow. I have known him well from his infancy, and I cannot help feeling as if I were to blame for this. He was accustomed to set some store by my advice, though less in the field than anywhere else. His mother begged me to warn him against the horse, and I ought no doubt to have said more than I liked to say; but I thought him so sure to disregard advice on that point that I did not care to press it."

"Of course not," Lestrangle answered. "Don't, for your own sake and the sake of your future usefulness, yield to this kind of superstitious self-reproach. It is of no use to say you did your best, because when the consequence turns out ill one always doubts if it was one's best. But if you felt content with yourself then, never reconsider the counsel after the event. If you do, you learn either to shirk responsibility, or to advise for safety, not for truth; and inability to take responsibility boldly and firmly is perhaps the worst of those feminine faults which impair the strength and usefulness of manhood, since hardly any man is so humbly placed but that he may have to

decide questions irretrievably affecting the happiness of other lives."

"I don't know. Perhaps, though I might have made him more obstinate at the moment, the recollection of my advice might have turned the scale."

"It might of course, or it might have done exactly the reverse. You did what you thought best, and if it has turned out ill you cannot help that. Well, we had better drop the subject, and keep to our work till you have to go. Of course if this, or the funeral and all its distressing incidents, have unnerved or should unnerve you, I don't want you to take up your work again till you feel fit for it. But, as a rule, I think the sooner one can return to regular occupation—even after the gravest of those domestic calamities that make an actual void in our daily life—the better."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SKELETON.

ON the evening after his cousin's mangled form had been consigned to the family vault, Ethert paced thoughtfully and sadly a path more remote from the house than the Eastern terrace, on which he and his lost relative had so often walked together. His loss was the loss of a well-loved companion, but one too young to be an intimate personal friend. It affected him keenly, but rather through pity for the life so bright, so promising, so early closed, and as it seemed to him so recklessly and uselessly sacrificed, through compassion and sympathy for those whose own lives must at any rate for years to come be more or less saddened and overshadowed thereby, than through a sense of personal bereavement. The calamity, though from every other point of view grave indeed, was one of those which, according

to Lestrangle's practical distinction, would not create a void in his daily life—would not take from him anything that he must hourly miss, would not be recalled to his mind by daily incidents or omissions. It concerned his personal welfare chiefly as it threatened him at no distant date with the burden of a barren and most unwelcome honour. Whatever property independent of the entailed estates might have been designed for Ivy would have been doubtless transferred to himself, but that his uncle's present state would hardly justify, even did it legally permit, any alteration in testamentary or other dispositions already made. At any rate he could not consent to accept any change in his own favour made, as it would inevitably seem, under his own influence, however just in itself to a nephew and the heir of the title, however cordially it might have been approved by Ivy and her mother as well as by the world. Still less could he allow the heiress hereafter to carry out any views, however clearly evidenced, which she might suppose her father to have entertained in his behoof. From such reflections he soon reverted to softer memories and deeper musings ;

absorbed in which, he was almost violently startled by a light step immediately behind him, and turned abruptly as soft fingers gently and even timidly touched his arm. Ivy was in deep mourning, her face pale with sleeplessness and sorrow, her eyes swollen with frequent tears; but there was more than sorrow, more than the sense of dependence which, sorrow and especially bereavement, so deepens and quickens in soft and clinging feminine natures—there was something of direct, anxious, though shy and almost unconscious appeal for comfort and sympathy—in the look turned upward to his countenance.

“You came here to be alone, Ethert, did you not? Forgive me for troubling you; I will not stay long.”

“What can you mean, Ivy? You cannot suppose me selfish enough to have come here out of your way, if I had thought I could give you the slightest help or comfort? I fancied both you and my aunt would prefer to be troubled with no other company; and I have seen my uncle just now, and found that the effort to talk in his present state is too much for him. Indeed, the doctor forbade him to attempt it this afternoon,

anxious as he seemed to say something he could hardly make intelligible."

"May he not feel, Ethert, that he must speak and has little time? . . . It is not one loss only. I shall have no one left in the world but Mamma—and you—if we are anything to you still."

Ethert could not maintain, could hardly remember at that moment the guarded coldness of manner which the hints of Mr. Brand and Sir Charles had caused him to assume, partly in conscious precaution, partly perhaps in unconscious irritation. Ivy at least was perfectly innocent of a proposal which would have revolted her feminine modesty as much as it had offended his pride and self-respect; and doubtless all ideas of that kind, if not set at rest by his peremptory refusal, had been dispelled by her changed position. Now she was safe and wealthy, and could look for a far better match than a cousin who could offer her nothing but the family title.

"My aunt has been as kind to me as a mother. You, Ivy, have been as a favourite sister from the first days I carried you, almost before you could walk, through these gardens. Except my

mother and Meta, do you think anything in this world can ever be half as much to me as you are?"

"Then, Ethert, what did I do when you were last here? for certainly something had changed you, had made you displeased, or more than displeased, with me. I thought till then, if I did offend you, you would tell me, scold me if you chose; you know I should have listened, and been only anxious to amend whatever had annoyed you."

Ethert's heart smote him; natural and necessary as it had seemed at the time to disregard the pain that his changed manner might give to one whose affection, perfectly childlike and sisterly as he believed it, he had dearly prized and warmly returned.

"Don't reproach me with that now, Ivy; I should like to say that you were altogether mistaken, but you would not believe me. Certainly you had done nothing to offend, nor did I mean to seem unkind or angry; but I cannot explain, dear. Try to forgive and forget. Is there anything I can do for you now?"

"Do? Only be kind to me, treat me as you had

always done till then. Yes—just one thing. Ethert, do stay a little while with us. I know Mamma wants you very much, though I cannot fully understand why. She has not liked to say so just yet; but when something was said about your going to-morrow or the next day in my father's hearing, he was so excited and vexed, he tried so hard to speak and protest, I am sure you would not have thought of going if you had seen how much it disturbed him."

"You know, dear child, that I am much wanted in London. My employer is an invalid and greatly dependent on my help. Without me his work is almost too much for him, and I am the more bound to remember this because he has been so kind in offering to release me. But I will stay so long as there seems any real occasion; so long as you or my aunt do not feel you can spare me."

"Mamma would not like to spare you for a long time if she could help it. But you will see, Ethert. I am sure Papa has something to say to you if he can manage to speak. At any rate you will not go to-morrow? For my sake," she added, seeing that he hesitated to give a positive promise.

“No, I will not, Ivy; if it be only you that feel as if you needed me. Your loss, dear, is a very heavy one; what it must be to my aunt and uncle neither you nor I could bear to think, even if we could realise it.”

“To mamma, yes,” Ivy answered. “Charlie was always her favourite, though something lately seemed to trouble her and make her anxious, I thought almost unreasonable with him. But perhaps she knew better than I. But I did not think it would have crushed Papa so utterly. I suppose it was only his manner—that he really loved us much as she. But—do you know, Ethert, I could have thought he cared more for you than for either of us? He never showed so much feeling, or talked quite to us as he did to you.”

“You forget, dear, that he looked on you as children—that he had grown to treat me more as a friend, and in some things almost as an adviser. I was sure this blow would be terrible to him, and—I think, Ivy, you are prepared——”

“I hope so,” she answered, very gravely, but with more perhaps of anxiety and of solemnity than of the bitter grief and fear of an affectionate

child, apprehending in the midst of a present bereavement the probable speedy loss of a beloved parent. "I am afraid, very much afraid, for Mamma. She expects it, but I do not know how she is to bear it."

"She has expected it longer than you have, and it will not come to her as the sudden, fearful shock that this has been."

He had drawn her hand within his arm; and, her fear of intrusion forgotten, sensible only of the comfort derived from his affection and sympathy, Ivy had remained with her cousin for more than an hour, lapsing gradually into talk of past memories in which the lost one had filled a kindly and pleasant part, when a servant approached them.

"Mr. Glynn," he said—and Ethert almost started at the name, formally given to him in that house for the first time—"my lady has asked for you. She wishes, when you are at liberty, to see you in her boudoir."

"I will come at once," he answered. "Ivy, will you go with me?"

"I think not," she answered. "I think Mamma will want to see you alone. I know

ever since—after the first day, she spoke of you and was anxious for your coming; half-afraid at first that you would not be able to get away, and then, I thought, fretting that you could not come sooner. Remember what I told you: I am sure there was something when you were here last besides Papa's illness, and there is something now that I do not understand."

The reminder was unfortunate, recalling to Ethert the strange proposition that had followed on Ivy's former expressions of apprehension; that he had, though till now unconsciously, connected therewith. He made no reply, and few words were exchanged before they re-entered the house; but even in these Ivy felt or fancied a return of the coolness that had so pained her before.

Lady Glynn seemed to have no little difficulty in addressing her nephew; and yet it was not that she could not command her voice or her feelings on the subject that might be supposed entirely to exclude all others from her thoughts. On the contrary, the few sentences interchanged on this topic were on her part almost absently spoken, as if uttered in a sort of routine

preparation for something that really weighed upon her mind, to which she was anxious yet feared to come at once.

"Ethert," she said at last, abruptly, "when you were here last something passed between you and your uncle, perhaps with Mr. Brand also, about—about family arrangements?"

"Yes," he replied, reluctantly, as she paused for his answer, and would not be satisfied with silent acquiescence. "But surely, Aunt, there can be no need to revert to that now? If you heard what passed, you know that what my uncle meant in exaggerated kindness to me would not have suited my pride or my independence, even had it been less certain to be yet more repugnant to another."

"You are mistaken there," she said hastily. "Ivy likes—I mean, Ivy would have obeyed her father's wishes and mine with no painful feeling. Of course she has not thought of such a thing; it has not been put into her head; but I know her and you well enough to wish that you could have thought differently."

"At any rate, Aunt," said Ethert, not a little surprised and somewhat annoyed by her persistent

reference to such a topic at a time so unsuitable, "the situation is now entirely changed, and there can be no occasion to return to a subject which was painful at the time; and which I could not bear to discuss with you. Only, you will not think that I do not appreciate Ivy, that I do not dearly love my cousin, because I—I——"

"Ethert, you know now that the title must be yours—may be yours within a few weeks, or even days. Are you still of the same mind? Do you not feel that the arrangement your uncle then desired has become yet more desirable now?"

"It is of course," he answered, "a great misfortune to me; but that cannot be helped. I may think it hard that the title should have been entailed without any means of supporting it; but I have always known the state of the entail; my uncle was always frank about that, kindly intending, I think, to spare me the disappointment of unfounded expectations."

"You know," she said, hastily, "the entail was not your uncle's work. He was almost an infant when Sir Herbert made that disposition. We think as you do. Need you scruple, need you think it beneath you to accept an arrangement

which would only give you what we all feel to be your right ?”

“ You go too far, Aunt. I don’t complain ; and in no case could I dream of redressing an unjust settlement by an interested marriage. Now please drop the subject.”

“ I cannot, Ethert,” she answered, more embarrassed and pained than ever, but persisting, to his infinite astonishment, despite a refusal so peremptory that but for the studied softening of his tone and his manifest reluctance to offend it must have been almost insulting. “ I thought then, as I see now, that Sir Charles had put the question to you in the wrong way and in the wrong light. I told him you would never accept a wife for the sake of her fortune—that your heart was only to be reached through your sympathy and feeling for others. Ethert, you have always been a good nephew to me ; you have seemed fond both of Ivy and of—*him*. You would make, I think, a sacrifice of pride and of feeling, much more a sacrifice of interest if that were needed, for the honour of the family name : to save me from disgrace and Ivy from a terrible calamity.”

“My dear Aunt, I should be only too glad to make any return in my power for your kindness and my uncle’s; and Ivy is as dear to me as I think a sister of my own well could be. For no kindness of yours am I so grateful as for the confidence that entrusted her to me as to an elder brother; and all you could ask of a brother it would be my delight to do for her. Unfortunately, I don’t see how she can need more than that friendly guardianship which any titular head of a family must give as of course to its daughter.”

“No, you do not see, Ethert, and I must tell you. Do not look at me”—the daylight was growing very dim, but Ethert had noticed, though without surprise, that his aunt had not rung for the lamp, or even asked him to light the candles that stood upon the mantelpiece. It was natural, he thought, that in sorrow so deep and so recent the dim light should be more congenial to her. But her present words gave a new meaning to this natural preference—“Do not look at me: I cannot bear it while I have to tell such a story.”

“Need you tell me anything, Aunt? Be sure

I will do all I can for you: I have no wish to know any secret it is painful to you to tell. Can you not trust me without explanation?"

"No, Ethert, you can help me only by doing what you will not do unless you recognise its absolute necessity. And—and, besides, you must be told. You think you refused to—to make what you call a mercenary marriage. It would not be so, Ethert. If—on Sir Charles's death—the estates will pass to you, not to Ivy."

"Aunt, you must be, you are mistaken! I know the terms of the entail, and my uncle himself explained to me how Charlie could, on coming of age, cut it off and resettle it. I know you are mistaken. The estates are entailed on Sir Charles's children, not only on his sons."

"They would not have passed to Charlie! And, Ethert, that is not all. There is no provision worth the name for Ivy, or even for me. Can you not understand, without my explaining, how that can be?"

"Aunt—no; only—I could not insult you by thinking of the only possible case."

"But it is so," she said, her voice failing, her

face half-averted, so that he could hardly hear her words distinctly. "Do you remember anything of your uncle's first marriage?"

"It was before I was born, you know; and she died abroad soon after my father's marriage. I think they had never lived in England. No, I may say I know nothing about it except the date, and some little of her family history, or rather of its absence."

"Do you know," she said, "that her father died insane?"

"No, I did not know it. But how is that to the point?"

"You say, Ethert, that she died abroad before your birth. You are mistaken—she is living yet."

Ethert was utterly struck dumb—astounded. Forgetful for a moment of his aunt's injunction, he could only turn and look earnestly at her, doubting whether he heard aright the low, broken, brief sentence it took so long to utter; or whether her reason had not been upset. He could speak no word of reply and ask no question. The silence had lasted for two or three minutes before she could continue; and

by that time he had realized that the story must be true, though without understanding how it could be so.

“Nothing was known of her—and it suited Sir Charles to publish everywhere that she was dead. She was always violent, passionately unreasonable, and made him very uncomfortable and wretched. At last, while they were in a remote part of Austria, her insanity became absolutely certain and incurable. She was put under restraint—became worse and worse—and has remained in confinement ever since—absolutely devoid of reason—and remembering little or nothing of the past. Of course I did not know this when—but it is true I suspected something—knew—or guessed—or understood that there were painful and awkward circumstances in your uncle’s history—that he did not care to publish at first the fact of his marriage with me—did not choose to marry in England. It was not till after both your cousins were born that I learnt the truth. And then of course I ought to have left him—of course it was a crime—but—how could I publish my own shame and my children’s?”

She had spoken with a strong persistent effort, in broken sentences, uttered at considerable intervals. The story had thus come out in fragments, not in coherent and connected words; and for that reason perhaps each isolated fact had made a deeper, more distinct impression upon the hearer's mind.

"You see, then," she said, "that my boy's death has saved him from much trouble, it may be from—— It is in your hands, Ethert, that it may spare Ivy—yes, it is of Ivy I think more than of myself—indelible disgrace. How Sir Charles thought that the secret could be kept, if you married while your cousin lived, I can hardly understand. Probably he thought you might come to terms. But now—Ethert, Mr. Brand knows, and one other man; but I think that is all, and . . . it is in your power. Of course the estates are yours, and will remain yours if you marry her. I ask no settlement for her, nothing for myself, but what you may be pleased to give. Of course my jointure is forfeited, or rather was never more than waste paper, since the marriage was void. But in this way, and in this way alone, the secret can be kept."

“No, not in that way alone,” Ethert replied at last. “I must take time to think; but it is open to me to preserve the secret by doing as evidently Sir Charles hoped I should do but for this last misfortune; to leave things as they are and say nothing.”

“Ethert,” she answered, “you do not suppose I have not thought of that? I do not think you would make up your mind to so extreme and unreasonable a sacrifice; nor if you did, and Ivy knew it, would she or could she accept it. You will see on reflection, you will find if you talk to Mr. Brand, that that is impracticable. You do not think that that possibility has been absent from my mind? I have discussed the subject with your uncle and with Mr. Brand in every point of view long ago—before *this* happened; and I have seen, as Mr. Brand did, that you could not simply and in secret give what is yours, or any part of it, to your cousin. The truth must come out, unless—now—it be concealed in that one way. If after all it did come out years hence, when she is your wife, when I may be at rest and safe from the censures of this world, it would be less disastrous, it

would not greatly injure her then ; and for me—it would not matter. But do not deceive yourself, Ethert ; understand clearly what it is you have to decide. You can save me from infamy, Ivy from indelible disgrace and from utter worldly ruin, only in this one way. If you decline that, you take the estates with the title ; and Ivy is known at once as an illegitimate child, and her mother as——. Ethert, can you bear to brand me and Ivy with that intolerable, unutterable dishonour ? Can you bear to let the world give us for your sake, to vindicate your right, the name I cannot bear to speak—that you—I believe, I am sure, Ethert, could not yourself endure to utter, or even to hear ?”

“Do you think,” he answered, in a faltering tone, after a few moments’ pause, wondering at the resolute sternness with which his aunt, generally weak and somewhat soft, easily moved to weep, restrained her feelings as she stated her case—with passionate earnestness, indeed, but without a sign of tears, and with scarcely a sob in her voice, “can you think, Aunt, that I honour you the less because you were deceived, or Ivy for what may have been her father’s sin—though I

do not presume to judge him, considering his temptation, the terrible misfortune of his early life—but certainly was no fault of hers or of her mother's? You must give me time, Aunt; time to think, and to see whether my uncle and Mr. Brand view this matter as you do; whether the simple and straightforward way of dealing with it be not still practicable."

"Ethert, you cannot have long to consider. Your uncle is dying; that he knows, and the doctor knows; and he is eager beyond all things to see this matter settled, to know what Ivy's fate is to be, to see it assured before he dies. You must give him your answer when you see him next, or you will kill him. And it is only while he lives that such an arrangement can be carried out."

"Aunt!"

"Mind, Ethert, this is his thought, not mine. I would be content with your word once given, but he will urge by all the kindness he has ever shown you, by all your feeling for the family honour and for ours, that all should be settled, done at once, and while he lives. Afterwards there would be difficulty—it would be too late."

Ethert made no other answer than to rise, bend over his aunt where she sat with averted countenance, and taking her hand in his, to press an earnest kiss upon her forehead.

“I will see you again before we sleep,” he said, “I think I can give you my answer then. Now I will see Mr. Brand; afterwards, perhaps, my uncle.—Aunt, what about Ivy? You say she knows nothing either of her misfortune, of that I am sure, or of your—of her father’s wish. Till I have decided, you will not give her a hint of either?”

She bent her head, giving the promise required by gesture, though not in words.

“If—if things are settled otherwise, you will not tell her that you have made such a suggestion, or that I—objected to it? You will not let her know that such a thought has ever occurred to us, and it will never occur to her. If—but of what is to be done in that case, which I hope and believe will not arise, we need not speak now.”

CHAPTER IX.

A CRUEL DILEMMA.

WHEN Ivy knew that her cousin had been closeted for some two hours with Mr Brand, she had expected him to come at once, or almost at once to herself. He knew her state of mind, was probably now acquainted with the truth, and she hoped from his sympathy and consideration for herself prompt relief for her anxiety. He would surely be eager to set her at rest respecting the mystery which weighed all the more heavily on her spirits that she was utterly unable to conjecture its character. That some terrible trouble pressed upon her mother's mind, that something affecting deeply the future fate of both was there and then to be decided, Lady Glynne's manner and her few words had rendered painfully apparent during the time that

elapsed before, unable to endure the effort of self-control, much more unable to keep up indifferent conversation even with her daughter, she shut herself up in her own room. Left thus alone, Ivy was all the more harassed by distressing anxiety as well as by sorrowful remembrances; anxiety far less for herself than for her mother. It surprised and pained her that, after his long interview with the lawyer, her cousin's step, pausing for a moment at the door of the drawing-room where she sat, passed on.

“He must know that I am here, that if Mamma is not with me I am alone. If he thought she were here surely he would come, and if he knows I am alone he might care to comfort me; would, if Can it be that this mystery, whatever it is, has changed his feeling for me; that he learnt something, when he was here before, that I do not know? I think he could make it so much easier, whatever it may be, if he would let me lean on him; if he would explain in his kind gentle way, would pity and advise me—I could bear it, whatever there may be to bear. But to have lost so much—if Mamma and I are left alone, and Ethert does not care—what will

become of me ? He told me I should be a comfort to her : but I know without his support I cannot : I shall only break down and make things worse for her. She would lean on him—she will always lean on somebody—but I am not strong enough.”

It was well that Ivy could not hear, could not dream of that which was passing in the meantime, in the boudoir, to which her cousin had gone directly, after a brief interview with his uncle in the presence of the family solicitor.

“Aunt,” he said gravely but quickly, realizing instinctively her intense eagerness to know her fate, the torturing suspense she had already endured so long, the agony of impatience she would feel in listening to any long preface, any preliminary explanation of his motives—“I believe I must say—yes ! I am sorry to find that Mr. Brand agrees to the full in your view ; sorrier to be compelled to own that, after hearing all he has to say, I am unable to answer or dispute his conclusion ; that the secret cannot be kept, that the renunciation of my legal claims would be practically very difficult, and perhaps in the long run ineffectual : in short, that the choice lies as

you put it, between the revelation more or less immediate of your painful secret and . . . the formal identification of Ivy's interest and my own. I have seen my uncle and have heard, so far as it was possible for him to speak or for Mr. Brand to explain what he was unable to say at length, the motives that rendered him so anxious for an immediate, I might say an instant, arrangement. The heir of the house is bound to be as jealous of your good name and Ivy's as her brother would have been. God knows," he went on, in a voice broken by passion into spasms that were almost sobs, "whether I would willingly wrong her: *He* may know, I don't, how I am to help it. If I could escape by renouncing all claims, all interest in the family property—but it seems that cannot be. I offered it, urged it again and again. To me, either side of the dilemma seems cruelly hard; and if Ivy feels it less than I, it will be only because she has less idea what she is doing. If I refuse to sacrifice my whole existence, I seem the selfish asserter of a legal right; enriching myself by robbing a young girl, whose natural guardian and protector I am, not only of fortune but name and fame, dishonouring

near and dear relatives for my own profit. If I make the sacrifice of my life, my peace of mind, I seem to take a mean advantage of a parent's humour—it will be said of a sick man's weakness and a child's simplicity—to snatch her fortune; and after all I shall probably render her as miserable as myself. In any case I shall look like a cur, and in no case can I feel satisfied with my own conduct. Aunt, it is *cruelly* hard on me: I don't affect to underrate the sacrifice I am making before you who know why I make it. But I will not make it unconditionally. I will not help to wrong another; and I submit to so much wrong myself, that I will endure none against which I can provide. I obey your wish and my uncle's; I am entitled to ask that you will carry out earnestly and faithfully what I require in return."

The words were harder than the tone, which was grave, sad, perhaps cold, but not angry or severe. In truth, Ethert judged his Aunt somewhat too hardly. He underrated, if she exaggerated the horror of the impending exposure. The same feeling, half-conscientious, half-chivalric, that induced him to admit her claim, quickened

his sense of her selfish injustice in enforcing it. He could not but perceive that the past kindness, which had seemed so generous towards a junior scion of the family, looked very differently as rendered to an heir of whose claims his uncle and aunt had been from the first fully aware. It was most painful to believe, but not easy to doubt, that their apparent affection and liberality had been interested, if not necessarily insincere. Ethert could not bear to think that his relatives, and especially his aunt, in the sympathetic natural-seeming tenderness that had endeared her to him, had been simply acting a part : could not bear to lose so utterly some of the sweetest remembrances of his own rather dreary life. He could not, would not think that Lady Glynne, when she entrusted his cousin so frankly to his care in childhood, to his companionship of late, had constantly kept in view the day when she might put an unscrupulous pressure on the affection she had fostered ; but he felt none the less that the pressure was unscrupulous, the pretext disloyal. All of chivalrous or poetic romance that tinged his character, all his respect for maidenhood and for maternity, revolted from

the selfishness that, to escape from open scandal and from extravagant reproach, sacrificed a kinsman's future and a daughter's happiness. Herein he did his aunt some injustice. She had persuaded herself that the wound inflicted on her child's feelings, if sharp, would not be deep ; that the violence done to her instincts was sentimental rather than essential, was humbling to maiden pride rather than fatal to wedded happiness. She believed that, under the influence of conjugal duty and conjugal intimacy, Ivy's present affection for her cousin would quickly ripen into warm wifely love. And though her fear for her daughter's fame and peace was secondary to her more selfish terror, it was both more genuine and better grounded than Ethert supposed.

"It is generous of you," she said, as he paused. "I hope you will not in the end have cause to repent : and of course you have a right to impose whatever terms may make your position easier, and to count on my doing my utmost to satisfy you."

There was something in her words and manner that to Ethert's sore and sensitive spirit

seemed to disparage the sacrifice she had extorted. Of course she did not know, could in no case have understood its full bitterness. How fondly he had cherished the hope or dream of a future of which Meta was to be the paramount object, the supreme inspiration, he knew at this moment as he had never known before; and this remembrance embittered his tone more than he was aware.

“My sacrifice, and it is the bitterest I could make in this world, is made for Ivy and for Ivy’s mother. She must never say that I helped to sacrifice her. The hardship might well be as great—might, if an enforced marriage were all it exacts of me, seem greater—to her than to me. Aunt Caroline, my first condition is that she shall understand distinctly what she does, and why. I don’t mean that she shall know the real reason: I would not for worlds that she should learn the meaning of such shame and sorrow as you have suffered, should know their very name. She shall not come to me—if she would come—so pained, shocked, and humiliated; but she shall be told, by the one person she must believe, that it is a sacrifice made for her as well as by her. She shall

never say, now or hereafter, that I married her for money—the one imputation I could never forgive. And she shall not be forced. Aunt, I know, though I can never understand it, that there *is* a coercion which crushes and compels a young girl's will as forcibly as physical punishment. It shall be her choice in the same sense in which it is mine. It is very hard on her at best, so young, so timid, so innocent, to bind her to a man like myself, even if I desired it. But she must understand all she can understand, that it is her parents' wish, for her sake—at any rate not for mine ; a marriage of necessity, and no more of interest than of inclination.”

“Ethert, you are wrong. Ivy would be very likely to accept you if you asked her simply, without any pressure ; but how can she be persuaded if she is to be told that you submit to it as a painful necessity, and is not to be told why it is necessary ?”

“That you must manage, Aunt. The thing is cruel enough : I will be no party to the more cruel wrong of deception. And further, I renounce all that could make marriage a blessing ; it must not be a daily misery and disgrace. I might say to

you, I have the right to exact submission, since I cannot hope for affection ;—that I am fully entitled—to make what terms I please. But that is not what I feel. If I will have no domestic quarrel, no cat and dog contest, it is as much for Ivy's sake as my own. Better for her that I should play the tyrant than she the rebel. She must understand, then, that—since the very condition of our marriage is that there is no confidence between us, that she cannot be trusted and consulted as she ought to be ; since she cannot be expected to yield from natural affection—she must obey implicitly as a child. Put it as pleasantly as you will : best that she accept the compact as part of an arrangement, no part of which can be other than hateful to her.”

“But, Ethert, you have always liked Ivy : she has learnt to look up to you, has often, I know, sought and relied on your advice and help. Why expect trouble with her, gentle, simple, trustful as she is ? Above all, why proclaim your distrust by exacting formally what should be matter of course—what she promises and must expect to render by the very terms of her marriage vow ?”

“You know how much that vow is generally worth ! If a wife obeys, it is either because she loves, or because she fears—not because she has promised. In our case the whole marriage vow is a solemn fiction—a hollow form. And as the secret must be kept from her quite as closely as from the world, as one chief object with me is to spare her the pain and humiliation she would feel in the knowledge even were it confined to her own breast, as I will not have her filial reverence disturbed or let her fancy herself degraded or abased in my eyes—as she cannot know why *I* am compelled to marry without love—she cannot but resent the falsehood and chafe under the seeming affront. She cannot submit from love ; she shall not be controlled by fear ; therefore she must give me beforehand, and independently of promises I cannot pretend to treat as serious, the right and the authority to maintain peace and avoid discussions between us. And when I have to act with or for her, I must needs demand from duty the obedience I cannot claim from loving confidence. I ask no more ;—none of the lies by word or deed that I refuse to speak or act myself, nothing that she should be loth to yield. You

know what Ivy cannot understand—exactly *why* I must give her my hand. If she accept it, and enable me to fulfil that one end, I shall grudge nothing that can soften or lessen her sacrifice; I make no claim on her affection or her duty, and she need never dream that there could be a demand on her gratitude.”

The words were spoken in a tone, emphasized by a look, which not a little disturbed the mother. But it suited her to regard them as no more than the expression of strong disinclination; as giving vent only to a keen sense of the hollowness of a bond not secured by voluntary choice and mutual love.

“Ethert, the fewer of such words used the better. Ivy will give all you can ask: she will, she *must* be content to take only what you can give.”

“But she must know—God help us both!—how little that is; must understand that in return I pretend to nothing that is not nominated in the bond: I don’t treat her formal promises as binding and real while my own are avowedly untrue. However, I cannot reason; I can only say—I do for her sake and yours what you desire; you must do for me what I think it necessary to

ask. You, not I, must obtain, and obtain of her own free will, Ivy's consent to this marriage, and, if need be, to that haste upon which her father insists. And it must be made plain to her if not what are, at any rate what are *not*, my motives, and what condition I require."

"Do you mean to say, Ethert, that you will not ask her to be your wife?" Lady Glynne enquired in great dismay.

"Most distinctly. I join her in lying to the world: I will not lie to her. Nor can I insult her, nor would I insult any woman whom I respected far less than I respect my cousin, by the brutal plainness of the truth. You know what the truth is: *I* will not tell it her. I hope you may be able to satisfy her natural surprise and scruples without making it too apparent to her; but I will not lead her to expect what cannot exist, and what, if without explanation I asked for her hand, she has a right to take for granted. When my cousin has made up her mind—that I suppose must be soon—I must see her, and see her alone. Till after our interview no word must be said to others, neither of us held to be finally committed. After that, I leave it to you and to

her to arrange matters as you will, to fix the time and circumstances of the ceremony. I presume the reasons that make Sir Charles so anxious to hasten it will render it necessarily private. Before or after that I must return to London; I cannot leave Lestrange long to himself, and Ivy would not wish to quit her home while her father lies as at present almost between life and death."

He rose to leave the room. Then for the first time some touch of really natural, generous feeling appeared in Lady Glynne's manner and conduct. She rose, and arresting his departure, laying her hand on his arm and looking up earnestly in his face, she said :

"Ethert, you know I am grateful, if I seem selfish. It is more for Ivy's sake than my own. But you love her, you have been kind to her so long : you will be kind to her still? Ethert, it is not her fault."

"Not her fault—her misfortune, and mine."

CHAPTER X.

THE CRUELTY OF COWARDICE.

HER mother's summons was a most welcome relief to Ivy's momentarily increasing distress. It had been painful to feel herself for a long time excluded from her parents' confidence on matters in which she could not but believe herself personally interested. It was not that she resented or was aggrieved by slight or neglect. From her father she had never received anything approaching to that confidence which, as their daughters grow up, judicious and forecasting fathers as well as mothers will gradually extend. Her mother, soft and affectionate, at times confidential, had always maintained a certain reserve, the more apparent because it was wont to come now and then as a sudden unforeseen check,

breaking the thread of partial explanations, suppressing appeals to her children's sympathy. But the most absolutely trustful and trusted child could not have been better content than Ivy to leave her future in the hands of those for whom she felt true filial submission and deference, if not the warm filial affection that only a parental tenderness and control, justifying themselves to the intelligence as well as the hearts of children, can secure.

What had grieved her so deeply was that she seemed forbidden to know or even to sympathise with her mother's sorrows and anxieties, instinctively as she felt that that mother did not lean upon her husband with such entire sympathy, such assurance of support, as could enable her to dispense with any other. It was yet more cruel now to feel herself isolated, kept as it were at arm's-length by her parent, in the midst of their deep common sorrow. But when at last her mother's message invited her presence, she was eager at once to believe that what had seemed like coldness or forgetfulness of her was due only to the intense sensitiveness which could not bear the tenderest touch on a recent wound; to reproach

herself for exaggerated self-conscious sensibility rather than her mother for self-absorption or unkindness.

Such being her thought, she failed altogether to understand the meaning of the strange embarrassment, hesitation, and trouble visible in that mother's look and manner. She could only think that, while desiring to invite sympathy, the bereaved parent could hardly trust herself to speak or hear of him whom they had lost ; and her first words of intended consolation, pity, and fellow-feeling were broken and half articulate. There was something timid rather than tender in the caress, something almost pleading in the look and tone of Lady Glynne, as she passed her arm round the shoulder of her kneeling daughter and gazed earnestly and anxiously into her face ; something that jarred on Ivy's sensitive expectancy as she answered, after a few moments' silence :

“Ivy, death, even for those who are left behind, is not always the worst or hardest thing. Children may cause their parents worse griefs than this, bitter as it is ; and the dead, at any rate, are safe themselves from sin and from its

consequences—safe from the sorrow they leave behind them.”

“But,” said Ivy, “Charlie was always a comfort, always kind and good; there was nothing to fear from him or for him.”

“From him—no. And it was not of the trouble that some children bring upon mothers through their folly or ill-conduct that I thought and spoke. But, Ivy, there is so much possible trouble before us, so much that might have been even worse for him—I cannot help feeling that Heaven has taken him from a trial that would have been only harder for us if he had shared it.”

“He would have helped you to bear it, whatever it may be,” Ivy said, much startled, and all her vague alarms re-awakened and intensified, by such a reference at such a moment.

“Perhaps, Ivy; but the difficulty would have been greater. Now it falls on you—you take his place; and it may be harder on you, but there is a mode of escape for you that might not, perhaps would not have been possible had he lived.”

“What is your trouble, Mamma? I have been

afraid, almost sure for some time past that there was something; and I cannot help fearing it must be a very great trouble if it dwells so much on your mind, even to-day. Can you not trust me? you might be sure of me. You know I should not speak of anything, should not say anything to hurt you, knowingly. Would it not comfort you to talk to me openly? I know I can only feel with you and feel for you, I cannot help you. . . . Well then, will you not talk to Ethert? He has been so much with us, always so kind to *him*; and you know he will be thoughtful and considerate for you, especially now. And after all it is he who really fills Charlie's place. . . . Is it that, Mamma? Is it that Ethert will be Papa's successor? No, that would not—and it cannot be that; you were troubled about something before now."

"I have talked to Ethert, dear, and he knows everything now. I am glad you trust and like him so thoroughly, Ivy; for it rests with him and you to relieve my trouble."

"With me? What can I do? You know if I could do anything to comfort you, to help you, I would try my very utmost. But I know I can

do so little, I always feel so weak, and now I am so lonely. If you could have Ethert here oftener, he—perhaps he will, now that so much will depend on him.”

“He will succeed to the title, of course. And—Ivy, it is there that my difficulty, my fear begins; for you, darling, as much as for myself.”

“Why? I am sure you may trust Ethert just as you might have trusted Charlie,” replied Ivy, with a certain slight unconscious touch of indignation in her tone; feeling her mother’s apparent mistrust rather as a wrong to those she loved than as evidence of over-careful anxiety for herself.

“I cannot explain everything, dear child, though I must try to tell you all I can. What I cannot tell, you must take for granted. My daughter will take her mother’s assurance; will not press for explanations I could not bear to give?”

“Of course, dearest mother,” said Ivy, clasping caressingly her mother’s waist, and looking up fondly into the sad, harassed face and wistful but half-evasive eyes. “Only I wish you were not so much afraid for me. Is it that you think me

too much spoilt by your indulgence to bear any trouble, to have courage for difficulty or misfortune?"

Lady Glynne hardly cared to face her daughter's look, affectionate, dutiful, trusting as it was; conscious of her intention to represent things not as they were but as they might most favourably impress Ivy's mind; as the proposed course might appear least selfish, most just or advantageous to Ethert as well as to herself. Hardly appreciating the young girl's thoroughly unselfish, loving, devoted nature, she knew at least that an appeal to mere self-interest was more likely to revolt than to coerce her.

"You cannot understand, darling, but it is worse than misfortune. You suppose that the property would of course go with the title, as it has always done. But—your grandfather married twice, and his uncle, the last baronet, disliked Ethert's grandmother and her family; and settled the estate not on your father's sons only, but on all his children."

"You don't mean that it is to be mine? How shamefully unjust! Would Sir Herbert ever have

had it if daughters had not been put aside for him?"

"I suppose not, and it is hard on Ethert; but it seems as hard on you to be deprived of your father's inheritance. But it comes to this, Ivy; neither you nor Ethert can well take the estate from the other. He would have to say why he disputed your right, and that would bring out a very shameful story, whether he succeeded or not; and if he let you keep it, others would think him wronged and tell the story to prove his right."

"Mamma, I am sure Ethert would never hurt us."

"Wait, Ivy," said her mother, impatiently. "Hear me to the end. You cannot expect Ethert not to feel that the property ought to be his and try to claim it; and whether he be right or not the story would be told. And, Ivy, that means shame such as you cannot understand or imagine;—shame that we had better die than endure."

"But, Mamma, let Ethert have it without any dispute. Do you think I wish to rob him?"

“Nonsense, Ivy! Whichever way it goes, if it is to be decided by law the truth must come out. You know Ethert could not take the estates as a gift from you; and if they are not yours ~~it~~ can be only because this terrible thing is true. After your father, either you or Ethert must be the heir,—which, is the question that depends on this story. Ivy, that question must never be asked; the matter must be settled while your father lives. Afterwards, you could do nothing for four years; and to keep the secret things must be arranged at once, so that your interest and Ethert’s shall be the same. You could not even arrange that when once—your father’s ownership is at an end. They tell me the Court of Chancery would interfere to protect your interest, and then all would come out. No, people must not know whether the estates come to Ethert directly or through you”

“What do you mean, Mamma?” Ivy exclaimed, in the first impulse of sheer wondering perplexity. She checked herself, as a faint dubious perception of the meaning dawned on her mind. After a few moments of silent thought she rose, averting her face, and walked to the closed and

curtained window, studiously turning away from the lamp that now lighted the room. The anxious, harassed, excited woman could see only her young daughter's bent head, the long dark curls that shrouded her hidden face, the slight tremor of her slender form, and the unconscious nervous movement of her small white hands. The silence lasted so long that the mother could endure the suspense no more, tortured as she had already been by the protracted expectancy of which this scene was but the climax.

“Ivy, must I plead to my child; entreat her to spare me shame and suffering worse than death, to save her own honour and fortune? Is it so terrible a price to pay? You know no man you like better; you have, you can have, no other fancy; and what do you resign? You will hardly have another chance if the truth became known; and Ethert, in character as well as in rank and fortune, is all that any girl's fancy, any mother's heart could desire. Another girl would be only too glad of such an offer, if she had nothing to lose by refusing. Am I so cruel, so selfish in asking you to save yourself and me from ruin by accepting what any lady might be glad and

proud to take? *He* might have rebelled, have objected, perhaps, with reason ; but you—if you have no pity for me, gratitude to him might forbid you to hesitate.”

In a storm of anxious excitement very alien to her native temper, and therefore the less controllable, feeling that she had reached that decisive crisis the expectation of which had long harassed her days and disturbed her nights, conscious that the security or misery of the future hung on that moment's issue, the speaker had lost her head—had forgotten womanly tact and prudence as well as motherly kindness, and gave way to that real contempt for her sex which so often underlies the assumed dignity and self-respect of womanhood. She spoke to one whose truthful, genuine humility was the strength and safeguard of a truer dignity, a far deeper delicacy ; and her words utterly outraged both.

Ivy turned, flushing to the brow with passionate indignation ; amazed, stung to the quick, and feeling herself for the first time in her life directly and outrageously insulted. But the sight of her mother's agitated, almost terrified countenance, the strange, eager vehemence of one

usually quiet and even languid, startled her with a sense of some urgent, unknown motive ; some peril whose nature she could not imagine, but which must be terrible indeed. Filial affection and sympathy as well as habitual respect checked the unwonted impulse of natural anger ; restrained the instinctive revolt of feminine pride and maiden dignity against such harsh depreciation ; against the cruel and even coarse expression of a view in itself coarse and worldly. In another moment the girl's keen sense of truth and justice made her ask herself whether, rough, unfeeling as her mother's language sounded, it were not literally accurate ? No one could be too good for Ethert ; beauty, rank, and fortune would not entitle any lady to look down on such a suitor : and she, she told herself sincerely, though not truly, possessed none of these attractions. She had nothing to give in return for all that was offered her—if indeed it were offered, not extorted. Lady Glynne's eagerness had overshot the mark. The moment that Ivy ceased to resent the humiliating truth, she felt the wrong inflicted on her cousin, if he were induced from tenderness to her, gratitude

to her parents, or regard to family honour to accept a match of whose inequality her own mother could so speak. She could give him neither equal companionship, intelligent appreciation and encouragement, nor even the poor compensation of personal charms; for Ivy, simply sweet, graceful and lovely, never realized the loveliness which did not assert itself to her own senses as striking or signal beauty.

“You are hard on me, Mamma,” she said at last, with quivering lip, moist eyes and tremulous voice, the indignant colour still lingering in her cheek, the subdued passion in her manner; looking like a high-spirited child coerced to reluctant submission by cruel punishment. “I would not think of myself; I would do anything to comfort and spare you, that did not seem wrong. But if Ethert has so much to give and I so little:—because I know what he is, how kind and clever and thoughtful, and I am so silly and childish and shall never be fit to understand or help him—it cannot be right. Why should he marry me to save us from what you say would be disgrace? I suppose it would not hurt *him* if all were known?”

“Let Ethert judge of that, Ivy,” replied her mother, well aware by this time of her error, and secretly thankful for the sweet submissive temper that had never before been subjected to so severe a trial. “The honour of his family cannot be a matter of indifference to its future head. Leave him to judge whether a quiet settlement of all doubts and disputes, the certain enjoyment of your fortune, the avoidance of scandal, be worth his while. Leave him to make up his mind whether he do not love his pet cousin well enough to be happy with her for a wife. Men of genius, Ivy, want peace and quiet, not clever talk and learned discussion, in their homes. Poets look for gentleness, tenderness, comfort in the companions of their leisure; and if you love and admire Ethert, he will never fret because you do not always understand him. Do you remember, he read to us a review of his book said to be written by his friend Mr. Lestrangle? The reviewer said that the very last bride a poet or novelist should choose would be his favourite heroine.”

The last sentence was far more telling than the speaker could have guessed: for Ivy had divined

in the half-infantine heroine of Ethert's favourite tale the idealized portrait of Meta, of whom she was quite unawares half submissively-envious, half admiringly-jealous. The suggestion, that she could be more to her cousin than Meta could be, touched her feelings in their most sensitive point. Of this however she was not herself conscious, as after a long thoughtful pause she answered:—

“ If Ethert thought so, if he felt under no compulsion, if he wished for me for my own sake—or even if he thought it would be best for him—if I could give him wealth and leisure and the life he prefers, if I were an heiress or a beauty—but why should he?—except that he would not be unkind ; he could not bear to take my home, and what might have been mine, away from me. Mamma, if he wanted me, Ethert should have me, and do as he pleased with me if he were disappointed in me ; but he shall not take me out of pity !”

Though the last words amounted to a direct denial of the very thing she was really striving to accomplish, they greatly encouraged Lady Glynne. She saw or fancied that the poor child—used all her life long to find her chief happiness in Ethert's gentle and considerate kindness—was nowise dis-

inclined to the proposed marriage; that she would at heart be glad of a pretext that might content her conscience and her unselfish admiring affection. Seizing the hint that Ivy's doubts afforded her, she mingled truth and fiction as adroitly as she could and dared in her reply.

"Ethert would be ashamed to profit by the chances of the law, if the law decided in his favour, to enrich himself at your cost. It could not look well for him to bring a suit that must reveal a family scandal, for the purpose of ruining a young girl both in name and fortune. By marrying you he reconciles everything: he obtains without delay or doubt or reproach all that the law could give him. It is well worth his while, dearest. If you had been undoubtedly your father's heiress, he might have feared to seem a fortune-hunter. As it is, no one can reproach him, and yet he is certainly the gainer. And, Ivy, he did not speak of your want of knowledge or talent, when he looked in the face all the reasons on either side. He did consider what difficulties or objections there might be: he made one—shall I call it demand or condition?—that your promise of obedience should be real, made and kept in earnest. He

said truly that there were things of which he could never speak, things he could not explain, upon which you must obey like a child, without reasons. Will that seem very hard to you, Ivy? I think not. And if that were the only thing he cared to mention, the only doubt he had that he would be happy with you, you need hardly be troubled. He will be content with you as you are, my darling."

Did the Father of Lies dictate the happy phrase that once more told with an effect of which the speaker could know nothing? Ivy remembered Ethert's own words to her, and fancied that she recognised his own thought.

"Mamma," she said, after another long pause, "is this quite fair to me? Can you not tell me what you have told Ethert?—tell me what is the reproach we have to dread, the terrible secret that must be kept at such a cost?"

"No, Ivy; and you ought never to have asked it. If its disclosure to the world would so shame me that I would rather die ten times than bear it, how could I tell my own child? How can you wish to make your mother blush in her daughter's presence?"

The girl was deeply hurt by the stern, sharp reproof she had not consciously merited; a reproof calculated to wound to the uttermost a nature whose sensitive delicacy was one of its deepest charms.

“I don’t understand,” she said, sadly and quietly. “If I must decide for myself, it did seem as if I ought to know the reasons on which I am to act. If you could—if you will command me, I suppose I ought to, at any rate I will, obey; but it hardly seems just that I should have to decide for myself without knowing why.”

“You know that your parents both desire this marriage, both tell you that it is for your own safety, your own welfare. Your mother tells you that nothing else can shield her from intolerable disgrace. The cousin you profess so to esteem and trust sees no other escape from a dilemma of which either alternative seems impossible. Do you think Ethert has not considered everything, or that the calamity from which he would protect us in this way is a trifle? I dare not tell you; if I could and would, Ethert distinctly and deliberately forbade me. He at least thinks the

secret unfit for you to know. Ask him, Ivy, and see how he answers you ; only, after that, do not expect me to meet again the child who could demand the secret of her parent's shame."

"Cruel!" exclaimed Ivy, tried beyond even her endurance. "You know I cannot guess what the secret is ; I could not know why it is unfit to be told me. But I will never ask again. I take you at your word, mother, though I cannot believe that there can be any real disgrace resting on you. You could never knowingly have done a shameful thing ; there can be no act or thought of yours that you could be ashamed to tell me or that it could wound me to hear."

Again Ivy was silent, again averting her countenance ; and for a while her mother was silenced by her last words, spoken in true, trustful, filial reverence, but for that very reason stinging with such bitterness of irony her who knew how ill that perfect trust was founded. But once more the long suspense, though she could hardly now doubt the issue, became intolerable to her over-wrought nerves and half-distracted brain.

"Well, Ivy, may I know my fate ; or will you

wait for more counsel, more entreaty, when you know what all who best love you, and know most of the truth, desire for your own sake?"

At last that gentle docile spirit was fairly roused; stung to uncontrollable indignation by the cold ironical tone that struggling irritability assumed. Her mother, with true feminine injustice, probably strove by adopting an injured air to conceal from herself the tyrannical if not cruel coercion she was exercising over her daughter's will, her present feelings, her future destiny; the systematic misrepresentation by which that tyranny had been enforced.

"I do not see that I have anything to say—yet—and to you. If Ethert asks me to be his wife have you not said enough—can you not leave me to answer him?"

Lady Glynne was at once made aware how thoroughly, in her eagerness to coerce her daughter's will, she had overlooked the effect she might produce upon her daughter's feelings. She saw how the mood of pain and humiliation which her language was calculated to produce, while it was favourable to the submission she desired and had thus far secured, might enhance

the difficulty that had still to be overcome. She had so stung and wounded Ivy's spirit that such another drop of bitterness as that she had next to administer might cause the girl's indignation fairly to overflow. She was confounded by the recollection that, while her nephew would not play the suitor, Ivy was not even yet prepared to dispense with—it would be less just to say the compliment than—the guarantee of a personal request.

Was it not but too probable that, after what had passed, its absence might excite her suspicion of Ethert's real willingness, as well as exasperate her wounded self-respect? And Ivy must meet Ethert in person and alone; while, to secure their union, it must be already taken for granted in that critical meeting.

She was sorely perplexed and embarrassed. With another girl the task might have been simply impossible. Perhaps Ivy's unselfish temper and unexacting modesty might be successfully wrought upon to accept the formal, as she had, whether consciously or not, submitted to the essential humiliation imposed on her. The situation might be so represented as to appeal

effectually to a heart so gentle and so generous ; Ivy might be persuaded that Ethert's motives in avoiding to prefer a personal suit were such as implied no reluctance on his part and no wilful slight to her.

“I don't think you could expect Ethert to say more than he has already said to me. He could not speak to you, of course, without explaining ; and he could no more bear to have told than you to hear from him all that he left me to explain. Now that you know how things stand, and understand your own position, what would you have him say to you ? Remember, *he* cannot allow that, as I have told you, the quiet admission of his claims is a great gain to him ; to allow that would be to confess that his title is doubtful. He offers to save us both from beggary and disgrace—from utter ruin ; he offers you home and rank and fortune. Would you have him pretend to forget all this, and speak as if there were nothing amiss, nothing strange, or forced, or hurried ; as if you could afford to answer him as you chose ? Would you have him sue to you to accept all at his hands ? I believe he would do it, if he did not feel you would think it a

mockery ; that he leaves me to speak for him, because he cannot bear to speak, and not to sue. Would you have him stoop to plead ? And if he would, have you thought—I am sure he has—what refusal would involve ? He offers you so much, and you are so utterly in need of what he offers, that a refusal could only mean that the very worst that can befall a woman is less hateful to you than the idea of belonging to him. And after *that*, if his claim be sustained, you are—we both are—dependent on him for daily bread. He means that, if you are mad enough to refuse, you should still remain his cousin, his ward. Nothing would make him unkind to you ; but he will not let you so insult him that you could not be happy in accepting his kindness. It is out of consideration for us—out of delicacy to you—that he has left it to me to tell you all he could not endure to tell, and to learn your determination.”

Ivy’s varying colour, the light that flashed and faded in her eyes, showed the conflict and change of feeling, as with some hesitation her mother pressed an argument so strange, founded on misrepresentations which of course the daughter

could not detect, but wholly inconsistent with those just before employed. She felt, however, that there was something kept back from her, something concealed or unspoken as yet. She would not admit to herself the thought that her mother could be paltering with the truth, especially at so critical a moment.

“Is that quite accurate, Mamma? Is it really Ethert’s wish, his own suggestion, and not yours? Was it his wish, without any hint from you, not to speak—not to see me himself?”

This question, as the reader knows, could be answered without any violation of truth, at which under less exciting circumstances, when her conscience was less completely overpowered by fear and anxiety, the mother would have scrupled.

“It was Ethert’s own unbiassed determination not to ask you himself. I hardly see how he could have done so. He could not tell you that he would have spoken at this time if there had been no kind of compulsion upon either of you, no need for haste or secrecy; and he could not have explained the necessity—could not have told you what he left me to tell. But he will see you

—of course he expects to see you—if you mean to agree to that which we all feel to be necessary for the sake of all. You can say to him what you will, then; only of course you will not affront him by seeming to doubt his sincerity, or me by doubting that I have told you the truth.”

In any other matter Ivy could hardly have been so imposed upon or bewildered; but where her feeling towards Ethert was concerned she could hardly as yet be perfectly straightforward and truthful with herself. The light in which she was now called upon to regard him was so novel, the circumstances so painful and perplexing, that she was conscious of no one clear definite wish or conviction. Could she have analysed, have stated to herself her own thought, her own desire, she might have found that she wished earnestly to believe that Ethert really loved her; really cared for her so far as to be at least a willing party to the marriage, independently of the pressure of family necessity. If he were a willing, even though not an ardent suitor, she could not be an unwilling bride. Perhaps she trusted unconsciously to the truth of her own

affection, her own intended loyalty and devotion to him, to win a warmer love than he probably felt at present. But the one thing most intolerable to her affection, as to her delicacy, would be to be forced upon a reluctant bridegroom accepting her from necessity, or, worse still, from compassion. She was, however, shy even with herself, ashamed to think what she did feel or wish, confused by the conflict of her own half-conscious emotions ; and therefore the more easily bewildered by her mother's sophistry.

“ Answer me one thing, one thing only, Mamina, but quite truly, quite frankly, keeping back nothing, not telling me half the truth and hiding something to spare my feelings. Is this Ethert's own wish, or has he yielded only to your wishes and my father's ? ”

“ It is his own wish, Ivy. He sees, as we see, no other possible escape from a position in which he would be forced to do what he would feel discreditable and dishonouring to him, as it would be disgraceful beyond words to us. And for his feeling towards you—you know what you have found him : are you vain enough to think that your conversation or company could have had

such charms for him, had he not loved you dearly?"

"He was kind—yes, I think he was fond of me. But it was just as he was fond of me five or ten years ago. Mamma, does it follow he will like me, that he will not be annoyed, impatient of me as a—as things stand now, because he liked me as a cousin and a child?"

"I think you may trust Ethert," her mother replied evasively. "Yes, Ivy, the wish, the decision is his, all things heard and considered. You must not wonder that he left it to me to speak for him. However much he might have wished it—and I do not know what he would have wished had Charlie lived—you must remember that the idea, the need of acting in such a moment and in such haste, took him by surprise. It is almost as awkward and painful for him as for you; and it is natural that he should be chafed and vexed by finding himself so driven and hurried, and shrink from proposing such a thing to you. But he wishes it, on all accounts. You had better not ask him such a question, but if you do he will tell you that it is his wish."

“Then, Mamma, I will do what Ethert wishes: I will try to please him in this as in everything else. But—” and here she utterly broke down. It may be hoped that her burst of tears relieved her sorely tried, cruelly strained spirit—“it is very, very hard! I did think a girl might know that she is loved before she is asked to—— If Ethert had said one word before he knew this——”

For the moment her mother dared hardly speak, and could do little to soothe her. Many minutes had elapsed before, still considerate, still gentle and thoughtful for one who had shown little tenderness for her, Ivy regained perforce her self-control; and glancing at the clock bade good-night to the mother of whose long and weary watchings during the last few nights she was fully aware.

“One minute, darling,” the mother said, compunction and something approaching to remorse giving a yet softer tenderness to her tone than it generally possessed even in her kindest moods: a more anxious, earnest searching look to her eyes. “Is this—this marriage really so hard upon you, so painful to you? I know, though you

may not believe it for some time to come, that I have advised you for your own good, that in the end you would have bitterly repented if you had acted otherwise. Don't think I doubt or under-rate the sacrifice of pride, of feeling, of delicacy even, you are making for me, for I know that as yet it is for me; you cannot dream how far what is necessary to my peace of mind is also needful to your own. But it would grieve me to think that the sacrifice was one of affection and permanent happiness, as well as of the feelings of the moment. Ivy, you have always liked Ethert; there is no one you like better;—there cannot be. You are not unhappy at marrying him, surely? only at being in some sense forced to do so?"

Ivy turned away the face her mother strove with natural anxiety to read, but answered with a very strong effort and in a low tone. Her words conveyed to the mother's heart such comfort as the consciousness of a hard somewhat selfish part harshly performed—consciousness too of the terrible responsibility involved in a decision not only enforced by pressure, but obtained by what was little better than deliberate falsehood—had left her capable of receiving.

“It is not that I am to marry Ethert, not even that I am forced to it. I could have borne that, especially if he had been the one to enforce it. It is that I fear—I fear, though of course you do not know it—but though you have not pressed him, if you have told Ethert all and he sees things as you do, I fear . . . he is so generous, he has always been so grateful to you, and so tender to me—I fear . . . it is not that I am forced, but—that he is.”

CHAPTER XI.

TENDER OR TRUE?

IT was late when Ethert retired that evening ; but, as he well knew, sleep was out of the question. For a long time he paced his room without even an attempt to rest. Thoroughly displeased with his aunt, and scarcely less dissatisfied with himself, the utterly intolerable character of either possible alternative forced itself in turn upon his mind.

He grew hourly more and more provoked by his utter inability to decide even what he really wished to happen. His fancy for a future marriage with Meta seemed, like all day-dreams of romance, stronger, sweeter, and dearer, perhaps more real, now that it must be abandoned for ever.

The affection he had felt since her very baby-

hood for his cousin, warmer and deeper than he was himself aware—truer perhaps, certainly more impulsive, instructive, and less fanciful, and probably more firmly rooted, than his regard for her rival—vanished, if it were not yet exchanged for actual antipathy, when he was forced to think of her as a wife; and a wife thrust upon him by circumstances, by her parents, by gratitude for kindness which now proved to have been by no means disinterested, by a delicacy which his cooler judgment half condemned as overstrained, by care for a question of family honour that hardly touched his own. He could see, however, no third solution of the problem that day so suddenly forced upon his consideration. If the marriage would be hateful and would seem discreditable, yet infinitely worse in appearance if not in fact was the only alternative course—a course which might yet be virtually imposed upon him.

He, a strong man, who had always prided himself on his power to care for himself under any circumstances in which he could probably be thrown—*he* to snatch fortune, fame, social position, from a young and soon to be fatherless girl;

he to proclaim her illegitimate, and her mother the mistress, where she had for twenty years been received as the wife, of the head of his own family! He dared not wish that Ivy should refuse, yet he could not endure to contemplate the position in which her consent would place him. He knew that the social sneers his marriage might provoke would be inspired quite as much by envy as by disapprobation; but he could not bear to feel that, if not deserved, they were unanswerable. He could despise the world's opinion—so long as the world must feel that he had the right; he could defy censure—if he could have felt the power to make his defiance effective. But he could not bear that fortune-hunters should be entitled to fancy him, not the Quixotic fool he might be, but a hypocrite like themselves.

Nothing galled his pride more than the recollection of the bitter uncompromising language in which, as novelist and poet, he had held up to scorn the very thing he must now submit to seem. The marriage, really a sacrifice most trying and cruel, a sacrifice of liberty, of love, even of interest, must, to all but Ivy and her

parents, appear a selfish and interested bargain. Nay, could he be sure that Ivy herself would understand it; could he trust her mother to tell the truth, or could he stoop himself to explain, or even to enquire how far it was understood? And afterwards, when the sacrifice had been made for her, would he not, as he had too truly said, have made her utterly miserable?

What could their future be? A formal marriage formally and immediately repudiated by any overt act—the idea which had at first dimly and vaguely occurred to him—would be worse than useless. Not only would it inflict on Ivy an unprovoked affront, an unwarrantable stigma; it would fail, and more than fail, to achieve its only purpose. The world, startled by so violent a contradiction to its natural inferences, would be piqued to tenfold curiosity; and if it did not detect the truth, would invent some yet more injurious explanation. But the prospect of an actual union was too cruel to be fairly and manfully faced.

Its pain would be enhanced, exacerbated, by all that would have rendered a marriage of love with one like Ivy especially sweet and happy; by the

charms of person and of character that would have endeared her to a stranger, by all the recollections and associations that entwined her image with many of the brightest and happiest scenes of a not very bright or cheerful life. Ethert had known but two close and cherished ties—that which bound him to the ward whose love he must renounce, and that which attached him quite as strongly to the cousin whom in marrying he would lose for ever.

The death of those we love is a light, a soft affliction compared with the death of love ; with that change of life-long feelings which not only embitters the present and darkens the future, but robs us of the past. And the absence of love was not the worst. Ethert felt as if he must inevitably hate the wife he had not chosen. The conflict of feeling was sure to engender a bitterness that must break out in taunts, reproaches, quarrels—a prospect ugly enough in any eyes, ineffably hideous to one whose nature rendered peace at home not merely the paramount object of desire, the first necessity of mental comfort, but the indispensable condition of intellectual efficiency.

If Ethert had less appreciated his cousin, he would have shrunk with less horror from the necessity of making her his wife. As it was, to the poignancy of his own disgust, his own misery, was added an anticipatory sting of remorse and regret for her—for the clinging tenderness that must be torn and withered, the childlike innocence that must be soiled, the sweetness that must be soured and embittered, in a position the most fatal to all that was best and loveliest in womanhood. Yet the idea of loyally accepting the situation, and, having made Ivy his wife, of honestly trying to treat and love her as such, never entered his mind. Not that he was wanting either in conscience or compassion, but that the situation seemed, to his deepest and strongest instincts, too intensely abhorrent for such acceptance.

It was in truth his very affection for Ivy that rendered this marriage so repugnant. That affection had been so thoroughly and loyally fraternal—the intimacy subsisting and encouraged since her infancy had so distinctly required as well as fostered such a sentiment—honour and duty as well as habit had so peremptorily excluded the

possibility of passion, and almost of romance, from a relation so confidential—that the closer but utterly different and incompatible union now forced upon him was felt, if not seen, to be unnatural, and the feelings that belonged to it were impulsively rejected as wrong and impossible. He was not clearly conscious of such an inward conviction; but it lay deeply rooted at the base of the instinctive reluctance and aversion which actuated him, and paralysed his conscience by rendering its utterances incoherent and self-contradictory.

The morning light had stolen into his room before he fell into a restless slumber; and it was late indeed when, suddenly starting from disturbed dreams, he awoke to the consciousness of that which lay before him, and became aware that, according to the habits of any life but that of politics, journalism, or London fashion, the hour was past when men should be out at their work or sport, and women left to domestic duties or drawing-room dawdling. But his supposed laziness would ensure him an escape for the moment from a meeting that might have been very awkward.

Nothing could be worse than to meet his aunt and Ivy at the breakfast-table, while still ignorant of his cousin's decision ; to go through the form of unconstrained indifferent conversation with that one thought in all their minds to which none could refer. Yes, there was one thing worse ; and of course that was exactly what happened. Lady Glynne was not in the breakfast-room, and her daughter was.

It was eminently characteristic of Ivy's sweet native courtesy and unselfish simplicity that she had never dreamed of evading so awkward a meeting. It was for her a thing of course that she should wait to give her cousin and guest his breakfast ; and it never occurred to her to avail herself either of the formal excuse afforded by her recent affliction—formal, because that of itself would but have drawn her closer to Ethert—or of the plea which, if she could not prefer, he must have assumed and accepted though unspoken. But despite the strange and novel constraint, the intolerable awkwardness of their mutual position, while as yet the question has neither been asked nor answered, she felt as if even on this subject she could better trust to Ethert's considerate

silence or gentleness of speech than to her mother's forbearance or her father's mercy. Ethert would know, as he had always known, how to spare and set her at ease. Her presence therefore seemed to herself a mere duty of domestic courtesies, and she ascribed his start, his manifest discomfiture, only to embarrassment, and in no wise to surprise at seeing her there.

Left alone with Ivy, Ethert felt even less at ease than she. He had never supposed that she would choose to meet him alone till the decisive and formal interview should be forced upon her; and in his dismay at finding her there, almost assumed that she had come to some unforeseen and probably inconvenient resolve. The momentary impulse to question her, as a man feels impelled to fling himself over the precipice to which he has come too close, was instantly exchanged for an intense apprehension of the approaching disclosure. It was one thing to hold the language of practical truth to the mother, who had no especial claim to have it softened for her ear; it was another and a very different one to deal with the half-conscious motives and half-spoken feelings of a young and

sensitive girl. He would fain have escaped when his hasty meal was ended, without a word of reference to the subject which engrossed the thoughts and fettered the tongues of both; and Ivy, naturally averse to anticipate the scene she could not but dread, and feeling of course that it was not for her first to approach the subject, would willingly have let him do so. But her perfect simplicity, her utter freedom from all affectation, gave her at this moment a clearness of judgment, a gentle courage which were wanting to others. After all, she had been told that Ethert would not ask her; had been forced to content herself with the question as already put through her mother. It only remained that she should give to himself her reply to that question: and, painful as this would be, no scene with Ethert could be half so distressing as another appeal from her mother either to him or to herself. Her soft, low, wavering accents arrested him as his hand was on the door.

“Ethert—you will not go away without Mamma will want you . . . and”—she contrived to say at last distinctly, though with tremulous voice and faint but painful blushes—“I believe

. . . . I understood you wished to speak to me this morning."

He had sense and good feeling enough to appreciate the effort, to understand the perfect innocence and loyalty of nature that had made it possible; and while once more fretting against the curb, strove to exhibit neither reluctance nor impatience before her.

"I shall not go beyond the garden, Ivy, in case I am wanted."

Some impulse made him look back, and feel rather than see her glance, half of pained surprise, half of reproachful appeal. That glance shamed him instantly out of the masculine cowardice or unconscious resentment which would have thrown on her an initiative befitting neither her years nor her sex.

"I beg your pardon, Ivy. Yes; I must ask to speak to you presently, when you can make it convenient."

"Papa," she said, "sent to desire me to come to him as soon as your breakfast was over. I suppose I shall not be very long with him, and then I will come to you wherever you please."

“Will the library or the garden suit you best, Ivy?”

She could not have told what there was in the question, and in all the brief conversation, that chilled and stung her heart, making it hard to restrain tears of wounded feeling; and she reproached herself with unprovoked petulance. Ethert's tone was cold and constrained; but that was not all. Quite unawares, Ivy felt without observing two slight but very significant omissions—the absence of a few trivial syllables which she would hardly have noticed, yet missed none the less; and yet more, the studied avoidance of the unconscious kindly direction to which all her life long, she had been accustomed in her intercourse with one so much her elder.

“May I find you in our old favourite walk under the beeches—where I came to you yesterday?” she replied, in a low shy and faltering voice.

Ethert felt that there was much of sweet natural sentiment in the choice; perhaps an unconscious appeal to the associations of a past whose tenderness might be estranged, but could hardly be for-

gotten. Ill as it suited his own mood, it could not but soften his heart towards her.

“As you please, of course,” he said, in a somewhat altered tone. “I will wait as long as you like, Ivy; don’t hurry yourself.”

Profoundly embarrassed, intensely irritated, Ethert, as he paced the familiar path, instinctively turned, though no inveterate smoker, to the one resource wherein, belying proverb and poetry, men now-a-days seek help in difficulty, counsel in need, and comfort in trouble. Poets may say what they please; in practice, like the rest of us, they tacitly own that woman is life’s chief source of vexation, and tobacco its best solace. Unhappily, like other “ministering angels” it has its caprices; like the drugs of the acknowledged pharmacy, it is least effective when most wanted. Sir Charles’s choice regalias had no flavour; for the first time in Ethert’s experience, they would not burn steadily. One had been angrily thrown away, another twice relighted, before Ivy appeared. True to her sweet genuine simplicity, to that highest courtesy which springs from unconscious habitual consideration for others, she had not indulged for a moment her natural shrinking from

an interview to which she could not but look with discomfort and embarrassment, even while she hoped and believed that it would be made less painful in fact than it seemed in prospect. Her trust in Ethert's kindness was not yet shaken, and anxious to learn his real feelings, she had full faith that in any case he would make her trying task, the hard alternative before her, as easy as the situation itself allowed. As soon as released by her father, she had hastened to put on her hat, cloak, and gloves; allowing herself only that necessary interval to recover from the effect of a scene which had jarred and grated on her feelings. Sir Charles Glynn's way of treating such a subject would at any time have been repugnant to her sensitive spirit; and his anxiety had made him harsh and imperious; but his paternal commands had not strained and tried his daughter's endurance as had her mother's less authoritative and dictatorial but—partly perhaps for that reason—more searching and painful pressure.

There were traces of recent tears in the girl's eyes, and her step was slower than usual; not that she consciously sought respite or delay, but that the distress and disquiet of her spirit were involun-

tarily reflected in her movement and bearing. Ethert noticed her altered carriage and demeanour as she approached; not without pain. Other trifles of the same kind affected him still more painfully; for he was not consistent enough to observe without being hurt thereby those symptoms of change in Ivy's feelings which corresponded most closely to the change in his own. It wounded him to miss the upward glance of confident affection, the trustful smile of simple open pleasure, with which she had been wont to invite or accept his companionship—the light touch of the little hand upon his arm, typical at once of the perfect ease and the loving dependence that had characterized their intimacy. Ivy on her part felt a sort of evil omen in a yet more trivial incident, as she saw Ethert fling away his cigar; it had especially pleased her to learn that on this minute point of etiquette she had hitherto been treated with less ceremony than a childish ward like Meta. She walked beside him for a few moments in silence, with bent head and half-averted countenance. It was hardly her part, as Ethert inwardly acknowledged, to speak first; though in truth he had asked for the interview

not to utter his mind, but to hear hers ; though all he had chosen to say had already been communicated to her, and he had only to learn her decision.

“Ivy,” he said at last—his own voice sounded to himself painfully cold and strange, echoing the discord in his heart produced by the jarring notes of habitual tenderness and actual resentment, of respect and pity for Ivy herself, impatient irritation under the compulsion of which she was the object and instrument—“I suppose I have nothing to tell you ? You have heard from your mother—what I only learnt when she sent hither for me last evening—what has been thought necessary in the interest of of the family—to what hurried measure I am compelled to ask your consent ?”

Her faint, timid “Yes” was so nearly inaudible that he paused till it was reluctantly repeated.

“Forgive me, Ivy, if I seem unkind or discourteous. You know, do you not, that this has taken me as completely by surprise as yourself ? It is not my fault that we that I am forced to act so hastily and at a time so unsuitable. I

suppose I have but two questions to ask
you must not be hurt or offended if in so strange
a position I seem wanting in consideration. . . .
The thing I most care for is, not to deceive you.
Pardon me if my first question is not what
you would expect. You know what is required
of us, and required at once. Do you understand
why—that we must choose between this—this
hurried step and disclosures that should
not be risked, for others' sake as well as
our own?"

The last two words, totally unexpected, made
on that account the sharper impression on her
mind. Perhaps she unconsciously sought to post-
pone the more difficult part of her task, or hoped
that Ethert's explanation might help her over it.

"*Our own?* No, Ethert, I did not know
I thought it was only Mamma and I that had
anything to fear; I understood Nothing
could touch you, could it?"

"I cannot separate my interest, my honour,
from yours. Anything that touched the women
of my house must touch me to the quick; and it
would disgrace me to be the means of injuring
you."

“Ah, yes I remember. Mamma said you could not claim your rights without bringing shame on us. You mean—you cannot bear to do that?”

Ethert felt that they were on very dangerous ground.

Scornful of his Aunt's social cowardice, he had been coerced by a horror of the threatened disclosure deeper than her own. All the world might have known it, if he could have kept Ivy innocent of a knowledge so fatal to her stainless purity of soul. His reverence for maidenhood in general might be extravagantly credulous, but there was no exaggeration in his poetic apprehension of Ivy's maiden innocence; and he simply could not endure that any glimpse of the truth, any vague shadow of shame or sin, should darken that snowy chastity of thought, or startle that perfect ignorance of evil which was for him the deepest charm of her exquisite nature. Alarmed by her approach to the point of peril, he spoke hastily and heedlessly:

“Enough, Ivy, if you understand that this is not a question of money, of selfish interest merely. If that were all, I would never have

insulted you by such a suggestion. But you know there are secrets which it is essential to keep, and which can only be kept in this way?"

"Yes, I think so. Mamma told me that; she would tell me no more. Ethert," she added with a sudden effort and in a less tremulous voice, "Mamma said—I understood her—that you would not have me told any more. Don't misunderstand me. I promised—even if you would tell me what it is, I must not hear. But only—if I must decide—do you really think I ought to have to decide without knowing why, what it is that compels? . . . Ethert, was it your desire that I should not know?"

He realized for the first time how unjust that obligation to decide upon imperfect knowledge must seem to the helpless girl; nay, how cruelly unjust it actually was. But that injustice was an inevitable incident of the position. He felt also, what certainly Ivy had not intended, that her anxious desire for fuller information implied under what sense of compulsion she would yield, if she consented at all, to a marriage which she appeared to regard with a repugnance as deep as his own.

“I am very sorry that you should be forced to decide without knowing what it is that you purchase at such a price. But—you cannot be told. It would be most cruel to your mother, almost as cruel as to let all the world know; and for my sake and for your own I could not bear that you should—I would not have my—I could not let you be pained, wounded by such knowledge. If you consent to this sacrifice—I well understand how bitter a sacrifice it is—it must be on trust; on your parents’ assurance that this is better, less terrible than the disclosure which they think can be prevented in no other way.”

“Do *you* think so, Ethert?” she asked quickly, unconsciously betraying how much more weight she attached to his counsel than to theirs.

“Yes, Ivy. I hoped at first it might be possible to protect you without—without telling you anything; but when all was considered and discussed, I had to own that it was beyond my power to make you safe in any other way. Do me the justice, Cousin,” he added earnestly, with a voice that trembled almost as much as hers had done, “do me the justice to believe that I would

be no party to such an exaction if I thought it possible otherwise to avoid—what I cannot bear to let you suffer.”

Ethert had no idea how fatally decisive were the expressions he used ; for he had no adequate conception of Ivy's implicit trust in himself, nor did he realize the exaggerated nature of the terrors he confirmed. Here, as throughout, his determination to leave explanation to another, and the impossibility of full, frank confidence between the cousins in this critical interview, placed them hopelessly at cross purposes. Had Ethert made his offer in person, though he could never have told or hinted at the facts, all the better would he have conveyed a just idea of their actual weight to a mind which the facts themselves would simply have shocked and terrified out of all self-possession.

Informed and guided by a clear-headed man over-contemptuous of the world's opinion, instead of an eager, excited, frightened woman whom fear of that opinion had driven frantic, Ivy would have escaped the infection of her mother's panic, she would not have felt that sense of a terror the more appalling because unknown, a necessity

the more cogent that she could not estimate the penalty enforcing it, by which she had been practically almost deprived of choice. At any rate, she would not have been misled by the apparent concurrence of views really as distinct, as well could be views of the same facts leading to the same issue. Few sentiments could be less alike than Lady Glynne's abject dread of worldly scandal, and Ethert's passionate shrinking from a revelation that would bring home the sense of disgrace and dishonour, the consciousness of shame, to herself. But this difference of meaning, wide as it was, Ivy necessarily failed to perceive ; so that her cousin's measured sentences only served to impress on her spirit the conviction that her mother had scarcely exaggerated the evil she apprehended, or the necessity of the only alternative.

As regarded that alternative itself, the cousins were again at cross-purposes. Ivy had felt, as the simplest maiden must have felt, a keen instinctive dread of being accepted rather than sought, of owing the offered marriage to the generosity or compassion of an unwilling bridegroom ; and this feeling was deepened by her own warm, pure, trust-

ful affection for Ethert. If only it were his wish, or even his will, for his ownsake and not hers, she would have been more than content ; confident of her actual and little doubtful of her ultimate place in his heart. She would not have enquired too closely into his motives, so only she were wooed, even at second-hand, and not forced upon him. The extreme youth, the absolute inexperience and ignorance of life which alone had rendered possible her mother's mingled deception and coercion, precluded her from reading Ethert's feeling through his words, transparent as, to a girl a little older and less absolutely innocent, these must have been. To reach Ivy's understanding, he must have spoken with a distinctness possible to few men in such a position, and doubly impossible to him. Mutual misconception was almost inevitable : the nature of that misconception which actually occurred was due to Ethert's peculiar character. Most men would have detected Ivy's willingness and misconstrued it : her cousin, appreciating her child-like innocence, her maiden delicacy, inferred even before she had spoken a reluctance at least as strong as his own. But in truth,

despite her fear that loving her as a cousin he might not like her as a wife—a distinction suggested by what she had read or heard rather than native to her consciousness—she never guessed, could not at present have conceived the total difference, the little less than contradiction between a kinsman's affection and a lover's passion. Her own heart gave her no clue to such a distinction.

Ethert was associated with all the pleasantest experiences, the dearest recollections of her past. He had always brought her comfort in trouble, had turned dulness or depression into brightness and pleasure: from his presence she had ever drawn confidence and courage. And now, to be his companion for life, the inmate of his home, simply promised her a perpetuity of the holiday happiness connected with his visits; and a shelter from that strange unknown terror which without him she dared not face—with him, she could not fear. She loved him better than anyone on earth—had so loved him ever since she could remember. She could imagine no truer paradise than to be shielded and petted as she had always been by him, and she looked no further and no

deeper. If only Ethert wished it—if only he would be what he had always been till the recent cloud whose presence she had felt so keenly, whose nature she could so little comprehend, had darkened and chilled the tenderness which had made the sunshine of her life!

“But, Ethert, do you wish it?” Ivy faltered timidly and low, raising her eyes for one moment to his and then turning them on the ground, while the faint rose colour flushed her pale soft cheeks.

He hesitated, scarcely less embarrassed by the strangeness of the situation than she by doubt or shyness. The question brought him face to face with the dilemma he had sought to escape by throwing on her mother the task of explanation and proposal—offered if it did not yet enforce the cruel alternative of brutal truth or courteous falsehood. In Ivy’s absence the former had been possible, if not easy; in the presence of that sweet, loving, clinging nature, with that soft voice in his ears, looking on that fragile form, associated since her babyhood with all that could appeal to the tenderness of home-affection, to manhood’s protective instincts, to chivalrous deference for ideal

maidenhood—it was impossible not to lie by tone and manner at least, if not in direct words.

“Need you ask me, Ivy? You know that I should not have dared, should not have dreamed of such a thing; I should never have wounded you by the very mention of a step so hasty and so painful and at a time so unseemly—if I had thought it less than necessary. If my aunt has kept her promise, you know all that I could tell you. I cannot help it: forgive me my share in your sacrifice.”

She felt that her question had not been fairly answered, and walked on beside him slowly and in silence; till even to him the long pause, the indecision it seemed to imply, became almost intolerable. In the crises of life, men and women alike feel that suspense is the one thing they cannot bear.

“Do you understand what is asked of you, Ivy? that not only must your answer be given to-day, but it it must take effect at once—while your father lives. After his death we could not act for ourselves; your interests would be under the pro-

tection of the Courts, the question of title would be raised; and that is what we must avoid. Do you understand? It is shocking, startling, I know you must feel it cruelly. But, Ivy, you know me too well to think I would be a party to such a proposal if I were not convinced that your parents are right—that there is really no other way.”

She found voice at last.

“No other for me, Ethert;—but for you? Do you wish it?”

“No way for either, Ivy. If you refuse—it is from my hand, in my interest, that the blow would come; and it would dishonour me to be the means, the cause of harm to you.”

“I cannot understand, Ethert. Cannot you take what is yours? we should not dispute it.”

“No, Ivy. The truth would come out. I wished, I offered to make over my claims to you; but it cannot be. There must be nothing to show the world whether Glynnehurst be yours or mine—unless you prefer to face the terrible revelation that I cannot bear to think of. I am sorry, ashamed beyond what words can say;

but that *is* the only alternative. It is for you to decide—it is not for me to urge you to either sacrifice.”

“Ethert, if you wish it, do not call it by such names; do not speak as if I were so ungrateful. Of course this—the talking of it now—the haste——” She broke down for a moment, and a few tears fell, a sob was half suppressed. “But if it must be, I ought not to complain of that. I am sure you would not hurt me if you could help it; and I suppose *that* is almost as disagreeable to you as”

She paused, faltered, and actually coloured with distress as she realized what she had been about to say. She had never meant to imply the shrinking reluctance that her repeated questions suggested to Ethert’s apprehension. She had always so looked up to him, and she had so thoroughly, so simply accepted her mother’s intimation that his offer had laid her under deep obligation, that she felt as if he must be hurt, had at least good reason to be offended, by the involuntary betrayal of her natural aversion to the precipitate action forced on both. He perceived her forbearance, though he could hardly fathom her meaning or

motive, and was much moved and touched by her considerate simplicity.

“As it is to you” he said, completing her sentence. “I fear, I know it must be unspeakably distressing to you; but if it is to be, Ivy, it must be immediately.”

“If it is to be!” she repeated, in actual surprise. Then, suddenly remembering that as yet she had not expressed the assent she had in truth taken for granted throughout, she stopped, flushed crimson with painful blushes, and burst into tears—tears that Ethert could not endure to witness. He could not kiss them away, as he might have ventured to do not so very long since; but, for the first time since the lawyer’s hint had brought constraint between them, he took her hand in his own, and held it as he had been wont, closely and tenderly, till she recovered her self-command.

“You have answered that question to your mother?” he said very gently, when her sobs had ceased, though her bosom still heaved painfully, and tears overflowed the eyes she could not raise from the ground. “You have told her? But you know, Ivy, I have not seen her to-day ;

and besides, I told her that I must have your answer from yourself."

His voice had instinctively softened into its caressing tone of old, and Ivy drew close to him and rested her head against his shoulder; not as a maiden yielding to a lover the consent she will not speak in words, but as the child who had always been wont to lean on his unfailing sympathy. But the gesture was none the less conclusive, though he understood how absolutely unconscious she was of the answer it conveyed.

"It is to be, then?" he asked, in a tone that had unintentionally become almost cold. "I believe you are right, Ivy; only let me be sure it is your choice in so far as choice is possible; that if forced, it is by circumstances, by your own judgment, and not . . ."

"Forced?" she said, half wonderingly, half doubtfully. "Ethert—Mamma says, and I am sure she thinks, this is your wish. Of course you would tell her so, I know; whatever you felt, you would not let her see you did it unwillingly; and you would still less tell me if I did not ask, entreat you to let me know the truth. I don't

know what it is Mamma fears; but I think nothing could be so dreadful as—Ethere, say that you wish it! . . . that you are not doing it only out of pity for us—for me.”

Ethere had more scruple than gentlemen commonly have in telling the falsehoods frequently required by courtesy and consideration to women; but he was aware that lying was an almost inevitable incident of the situation. The marriage itself was so monstrous, so atrocious a fiction that any minor lie was hardly worth the trouble of a thought. One only falsehood he was resolved not to tell; he would not profess or promise a love he did not feel. But in regard to her present question, he was by no means sure at the moment what the truth was; and quite sure that be the truth what it might it was the last thing to be told. He had realized clearly, since the conversation began, what had seemed less certain till now—that, since he could not endure to proclaim his cousin’s illegitimacy, this marriage was for him as well as for her the only safe, the only tolerable course. In that sense he wished it; and if that were not the sense of her question, it must suffice for his reply.

“Yes, Ivy; under the circumstances, I must wish it. I don’t see what other course is open to me. I wish it—if you are willing, or if you choose, to make so great a sacrifice to your mother’s feelings, your mother’s interests and your own, where both are so terribly involved. I could not wish—what must be the consequence of your refusal.”

“You think it right, then, Ethert? But if it is right, do not speak of the sacrifice *I* make. I—I am almost a child, and an ignorant, dull, rather foolish child; I have nothing to give you; I hardly understand whether I have even the least thing of all, money; I am neither clever nor companionable, nor even pretty. And you—you have been my only friend except my parents and Charlie; and you were always kind, have always done so much to make the time pleasant, to make me happy while you were here. If I dared hope that I could make you happy, Ethert, I don’t think I ought to let you speak of a sacrifice on my part.”

He was deeply touched, fully understanding alike the considerate feeling, the kindly recollec-

tions, and the conscientious love of truth which had prompted her disclaimer.

“A sacrifice, Ivy,” he said gently, “because if there had been no such necessity, if things had stood as we thought they stood a short time ago, none of us would have dreamed of this. You are forced to wish it as I—wish it,” he concluded, giving a new turn to the sentence as he felt, just in time, how brutal would sound in his own ears the words he had well-nigh uttered. He had meant, did mean, that she should understand the truth. He had insisted that she should know that, to him as to herself, the marriage was a painful necessity; and he supposed that, in language more or less explicit, this had been conveyed to her. But he could not repeat it. Face to face with her, he simply *could* not say: “You are forced as I am forced.” It was his fatal mistake, the mistake to which Ivy was sacrificed. She was throughout the victim not more of her mother’s deception than of Ethert’s misplaced delicacy. Could he have been frank at the cost of courtesy and even of kindness, she would at least have escaped the misconception under which, intending simply to follow Ethert’s guidance, she

seemed to him to accept the sacrifice exacted from him on her behalf and yielded for her sake—a sacrifice he could make, but could not forgive. Now, having made up her mind that, if he so willed, her mother's purpose was to be carried out with full acquiescence on her side—and gathered from his words that at any rate, if not exactly his wish, it was distinctly and decidedly his will—she was very slow to catch any hint that contradicted the view thus impressed on her.

There was a long pause. Ivy could not feel satisfied, but knew not how to repeat her questions. It was probably in an unconscious effort to obtain something like an answer, to her heart if not her ear, that she put out timidly the hand he had dropped. He took and pressed it, and in that pressure she understood what he certainly had not meant to imply.

“One thing more,” he added, hesitating and almost faltering, so great was the effect of Ivy's actual presence—so impossible seemed it, while his eyes rested on that countenance of which feminine gentleness and submission were scarcely less characteristic than child-like grace and

purity, to name what in her absence it had seemed natural and necessary to stipulate—"One thing more your mother promised to tell you. I should be very sorry if it hurt you, sorry you should fancy either that I distrust you or mean to try you more hardly than need be; but ——"

"Yes," she interrupted, willing to spare him what he seemed scarcely able to speak. "Could you doubt me, Ethert; doubt that I should keep faithfully the promises I must make?"

"That one at least," he answered, glad to lighten the subject with a half jest, "ladies construe generally in a non-natural sense. But, Ivy, that is not all. In making that promise merely as others make it, you would expect, and rightly expect, to be consulted, to be heard; expect that I should give you my reasons and listen to yours, even if I set them aside. That is just what I cannot do. I fear that even you will find silent unreasoned obedience hard to render. 'You treat me like a child' is, I believe, the usual excuse of conjugal rebels; and like a child in many ways I shall have to treat you."

“I have always been—I am still, almost—a child with you, Ethert; and if you will not treat me more hardly than a child——”

No revolt, no indignant outburst would have been half so disconcerting as her simple unaffected submission.

“You misunderstand me, Ivy. It is that we begin with a secret between us, without the confidence that if it were possible would be your right; and that I must stipulate for that which under happier circumstances you would be the last to withhold—which should have been rendered easy by mutual trust and mutual choice. But on the other hand that is all I ask. I can give so little, it is so hard on you in every way, that, if only you are amenable to guidance and refrain from quarrelling, I have no right to expect more. You need not fear that I shall ever forget how little I can claim, how much is due to one who is forced into marriage—not I hope by threats or scolding, but forced nevertheless.”

“I don’t understand trifling with a promise; especially”—she coloured and faltered a little—“with such promises. I am sorry you seem to think I might—and for the very reasons which

should make me more careful. But I can only say I will do my best, and if I fail, Ethert, I do not think you will be too hard on me; only, don't repeat that I am forced, and *do* say that you are not."

Here, for the first and last time, the question was fairly put; here came the opportunity, perhaps even the obligation to speak the truth, at any rate a direct alternative between truth and falsehood. But it seemed too late for frankness, especially after he had unwittingly elicited from Ivy a consent the comparative willingness of which, though of course affected only in delicacy towards himself, surely called for at least equal consideration on his part. Moreover to avow the truth would sting, almost drive her to revolt; and thus and at this stage to throw upon her the responsibility of a rupture would be a mean, unmanly, and ungenerous evasion. And so Ethert threw away the last chance of sparing her and himself pain far keener and more lasting than the harshest utterance of the plain truth could have inflicted.

"If I could have borne to palter with you, Ivy, I would not have done what seems so

strangely discourteous ; I would not have left my aunt to say what you must naturally have thought should have come from me. I am forced—to believe that this is best, wisest for both of us. In truth, Ivy, the thought that has troubled me most has not been that I have no choice, but that you have none. At any rate let me hope, let me be sure that it *is* your decision—that you have not been pressed, teased, scolded into it? If you repent, if you shrink from it even now, it is not too late. I know that your mother was terrified, excited, and she might force or frighten you more than she would mean. I can believe that my uncle might be stern and hard where he is so bent on his purpose, where he thinks, as we do, the necessity is so strong and so clear—and you are shy and timid. Have you been frightened—forgive me if I say, bullied—into this? If you have—it is too hard on you :—tell me—say you would rather not, and you shall have nothing to fear that I can spare you, not even a word of reproach from any one—I will take it all on myself. I have not promised : I am not bound to any one but you, as yet. It was lest you should be hurried into unwilling sub-

mission that I insisted upon hearing your determination from yourself, and said I would not answer finally till I had seen you alone. If this be not your own choice, knowing all you can know—Ivy, would you wish me to tell your parents that, even if you would agree—I will not?”

He thought that he had told the truth, had given her freedom of choice as nearly as the circumstances allowed, as courtesy and kindness would permit. In words perhaps he had done so. But once more his fatal consideration, partly for her sex, partly for her own sensitive feelings, her maiden dignity, came into play. His aversion to suggest to a woman, above all to a young girl, and one he had been accustomed to treat so tenderly, the idea most offensive to womanly pride—the thought that feminine willingness avowed or betrayed had been met by rejection or reluctance—gave an unintentional unstudied softness, tenderness to his voice, manner, and even words that wholly deceived her; deceived her the more easily that they seemed a natural renewal of the kindness that had so long since won her heart. Consoled and

re-assured by his first sentences, Ivy was touched by what seemed to her the considerate delicacy of the final offer. Far too generous and trustful to imagine a concealed slight, far too loyal and simple untruly to affect such a fancy, the proposal that might have broken her mother's meshes was actually that which knotted them fast and finally around her.

"It is very kind of you, dear Ethert: it is as you have always been to me. No; I gave Mamma my word willingly—if only I were sure of you. And now"—and here her hand voluntarily rested on his arm, though she did not look up into his face, but bent her head and kept her eyes fixed on the ground, while a slight colour returned to her pale cheek as she murmured—"now I am not less—no—I am much more willing than when I came to you here. I know you will be good to me, as you always were—it was foolish of me to doubt."

Ethert could not answer, could not have borne to repudiate that sweet and simple trust. Perhaps for the moment he had forgotten its new meaning; forgotten that even in the old sense he could never affect to be good to her again.

CHAPTER XII.

“TO LOVE, HONOUR, AND CHERISH.”

“**I** SEE no help for it,” said Lestrangle. “It must be reviewed at once, and you don’t know anyone who could do it better than yourself.”

“Or worse,” I replied. “I cannot sneer in print; and though the book might deserve it, the author has earned exemption from contempt. Critics consider themselves licensed to retail abuse and ridicule on all able men who take unpopular views; but this is not a man whom I could stoop to insult. He is out of his depth this time, but—so am I.”

“It seems to me shallow—all froth and foam,” returned Lestrangle; “but I admit that a journalist’s or even a theologian’s right to be ‘drunk on the premises’ don’t apply to *his*, in-

toxicating or bewildering as they seem. Can't you answer him? You know as much as most amateurs;—enough perhaps to gauge your own ignorance?”

“Exactly. Breve might try, if you choose to chance the consequences.”

“No doubt; but Breve always proves too much; demonstrates too clearly that Philhellen is a dunce, and Darwin an addle-pated ignoramus. Before he found out who Procyon was, he exposed scathingly Procyon's boyish inexperience of life, and proved especially that the ‘poor young fellow’ had never seen the inside of a newspaper office. But what is ——'s thesis: ‘what does it prove?’”

“I don't know—the argument is transcendental to the utmost limits of meaning—unless it be that creation is a sort of a kind of vision of the Universal Mind; and, if That were to wake, I suppose we should all ‘go out,’ like Carroll's Alice in the Red King's Dream.”

“Turning the tables on those who say that the Creator is a dream of His creatures? But the idea is not new; and if it were true, no one could believe it. Can't the man see that—except by the

Universal Mind—it is necessarily unthinkable? It has one recommendation though; it would account for the suspension of development with the appearance of Man.”

“How so?”

“Because humanity must have been the nightmare of the Demiurge; and when civilization was evolved, the hideous spectacle must have made Him awaken with a “cosmic” scream. Not that the step from brute to Aryan is so very wide. After all, men are curs and women cats.”

“Take the book in hand yourself and develop that thesis,” I said, laughing. “*That* number of the *Courier* would sell.”

“No; I never tell cynical truths and I never write heresy, except over my own signature. Within this office the Thirty-nine Articles are the basis of all truth and the measure of all novelties: and I only indulge my cynicism by proving now and then that some novel and undeniable truth is an old and damnable heresy. Moreover, however tempting the subject, I cannot write three lines till Glynne returns. My right arm, as you see, is useless; and Thomas cannot be trusted with words of more than two syllables. Try Glynne,

by the way, when he comes back: mysticism has always charms for him.”

“Talk of—the first Whig,” said I, “and——” as, to our chief’s great surprise, his assistant entered the room.

“Well,” said Lestrangle, cordially holding out his left hand, “I could not be more glad to see you: but I as much expected to see the Arch-Radical in person.”

“I had promised my—I had intended,” replied Glynne, with unaccountable but unmistakable embarrassment, “to stay over to-night at any rate; but—I have business of—my uncle’s to do in London, and I am sorry to say I must go back on Friday; so I thought it best to return to my post at once. Of course, till Friday afternoon, I am entirely at your disposal.”

Finding that Glynne had not read the book in question, and would not have time to do it justice, I accepted the task imposed on me and left the room.

“Here is a private letter for you, Glynne,” said Lestrangle. “When you have read it, there are a whole pile on business.”

The communication thus handed to Ethert came from Meta.

“Your mother,” she wrote, “does not feel equal to writing herself; and, Ethert, I am glad she lets me do it. She has talked of coming to town to see Dr. —, but less decidedly than she is used to speak of anything. Do press her to do so, and soon; and unless you can take care of her entirely, get her to bring me. I don’t want to frighten you, but she seems very ill, and I am sure she ought not to be alone.”

His mother’s character, the least caressing and the coldest in external demeanour that he had ever found in woman, had tended from the first to suppress, if not to repel, her son’s affection, to produce not merely reserve in the expression, but a certain coldness in the inward temper of an attachment that was really deep and strong. No doubt, reaction from that domestic repression had done much to render Glynnchurst so especially attractive; to make Ethert’s tone and manner yet softer and more affectionate towards those with whom, as with Ivy and Meta, his heart was at ease, his indulgence and utterance of feeling unconstrained. But his filial regard was earnest

and profound, and he was much disturbed, if not altogether surprised, by Meta's warning. Lestrangle, more observant than people commonly supposed, noted with what difficulty his secretary turned to the work before him.

“Your mind,” he said, “runs on something else—I fancy on the letter you have received. If so, answer that first: get it off your mind to begin with, as far as you can.”

Lestrangle was generally charged with hardness of feeling and coldness of heart—partly but not wholly, I think, because his cynical sincerity refused to affect sympathy with sorrows more decorous than deep. When this charge was once preferred in his presence, Glynne answered warmly :

“Lestrangle is too busy to observe, and has suffered too much to care for, trifles; but I never received so many kindnesses, great and small, from any other living man or woman.”

Certainly the Editor of the *Courier* could hardly be called selfish in the usual acceptation of the word. His indifference to others never seemed to spring from exaggerated regard for himself. In delicate health, frequently unable to

sleep, and, as I chanced to know, passionately fond of flowers, grass, birds, all the attractions of the country, it must have been a sacrifice of everything that made his solitary life endurable to live, as he had chosen to do, in two or three small rooms within the building that contained the offices of the *Courier*. But he had determined that this would enable him to do his work more satisfactorily; that, living at any distance, he could hardly give a close, constant supervision to the difficult task of creating what was in fact a new journal; and seeing this, he had made the sacrifice without hesitation and without a word of complaint. He was distinctly less exacting towards others than towards himself. It was, I think, the consciousness of this enforced upon us all that enabled him to maintain a discipline, to insist on or obtain without insistence a devoted attention to their several duties from all the members of his staff, to which I believe the success of the *Courier* was mainly due.

At our meeting on the next Friday I observed that Glynne was certainly pale, and either overworked or mentally harassed; the former probably, I supposed, since I knew how close, how

protracted, had been Lestrangle's own labours, how absolutely he was dependent on the eyes, the hands, and in great measure on the practical thought and memory of his subordinate. Before the council was half over, he turned to his secretary :

“ You had better go now, Glynne ; there is nothing more that you need do. Catch your train at your leisure. Now then,” when Glynne had left us, “ what do you think, Leaf, of the news from the Levant ? how, I mean, will it affect our prospects ? The crimson toga will be hoisted very soon, and perhaps suddenly.”

Leaf answered with more bitterness than he was wont to show :

“ It will give the measure of Blight's impartial humanity and Philhellen's moral indignation. It ought to teach every man who has eyes to read and sense to understand that the one only loved the Russians as the hereditary enemies of England, and the other only hated the Turk as the *protégé* of Endymion. But those men have the public ear, and have deafened it to everything so trivial and so troublesome as a fact. Their clients have outdone tenfold all the crimes, real

and fictitious, charged on ours; but they, who bellowed execrations when rebels were massacred by the soldiers of a Power standing with its back to the wall, will not speak a word to condemn or lift a finger to restrain the rebels who in profound peace are butchering loyal subjects.”

“Well, we always knew,” replied Lestrangle, “that hatred of his country was Blight’s ruling passion, and personal enmity the key to Philhellen’s policy. The latter is almost frantic in his rage against his rival, maddened by his own failure and Endymion’s success. Nothing that can happen now will enlighten those who have not seen long ago that vanity and vindictiveness give the clue to every strange winding of that man’s tortuous career. Expulsion from Oxford was the final cause of Disestablishment; defeat in South Lancashire, not Fenian outrages, originated the Landlords’ Robbery Act. It was Lord Derby’s preference of Vivian Grey that made him a Radical, and supersession by Palmerston all but turned him back into a Tory. But I asked not what you thought of the Eastern conflagration, but what shadows it will cast here in the West.”

“Shadows enough, truly; it will enlighten nobody! A populace that cheered Castro because they knew him to be the butcher Orton, and hooted those who denied his claim to be Roger Tichborne, that made an M.P. of Kenealy and will make one of Bradlaugh, may well believe in Blight’s patriotism and Philhellen’s Christian charity. Common sense has a poor chance against the thunder of B.’s invective and the fireworks of P.’s eloquence. There are fools—enough to turn the scale in fifty English boroughs—who really believe that Toryism had something to do with the depression of trade, and that a Radical Ministry will give us a warm summer and a splendid harvest. That, you will find, is the creed of more electors than turned the balance in ’74.”

Before leaving London, Ethert had very unwillingly arranged for the leave of absence which he knew that he might require. He had not chosen to announce his marriage even to Lestrangle. Indeed, he had not communicated it to his mother or to Meta till the very morning of the appointed day; persistently arguing with himself that something might yet break off an arrangement so

repugnant to both the parties principally concerned. In his heart he knew that, while left to the influence of her parents, nothing could give Ivy courage to recall her pledge of compliance. He knew almost equally well that, her word once passed to himself, nothing—short of that discovery which he dreaded no less than the marriage whereby he had consented to avert it, or a distinct avowal of his own dislike—would induce her to forfeit her promise. It might be that he would not endure to realize in imagination a future so abhorrent; it might be that he could not believe in the certainty of an event that seemed more hateful as it drew nearer: it might be that the extreme haste, and the hurry of the measures he was forced to take, had left him neither time nor composure to think quietly of his position. But, from whatever cause, he found that he did not and could not accept the prospect as a sure or even a probable reality. He had an inward assurance, a presentiment that it would not be—something would, must occur to prevent or postpone it. Therefore he had simply told Lestrangle that he feared lest family business might prevent his return to work for three weeks at least.

“Very well,” his chief had answered. “I can give you a month from to-day, but not a day longer, if I am to depend on your return, and not to fill your place. Leaf has long since arranged to take a holiday next month, and while he is absent you will be indispensable. If your return be uncertain, tell me at once and give me time to find a substitute.”

“I engage positively,” had been his assistant’s reply, “to return on this day month at latest; it is quite possible that I may find a long leave of absence unnecessary.”

By absenting himself entirely during the brief interval that necessarily separated the betrothal from the marriage day, Ethert had probably done well, and—assuming that the marriage was to be—even kindly by Ivy, as he had certainly spared himself much trouble and many trying scenes. Too short for the natural growth of a new relation, the time would have been too long for the persistent avoidance at once of self-betrayal and self-committal; too long, probably, for the effectual concealment of his chafing under the yoke. There was not leisure to dispel Ivy’s painful consciousness of enforced and unseemly

haste; there would have been more than enough to let her find out that she had lost a friend without gaining a lover. The wedding was fixed by special license for the first possible evening, and Ethert had so timed his return that there was no opportunity for a private interview with his bride. The cousins met in presence of Ivy's parents and of the family solicitor, and the party had not been assembled half-an-hour ere they were summoned to take their places in the room adjoining that of Sir Charles, now absolutely confined to the couch he never expected again to leave. Here, that he might witness it through the open door, the ceremony was to be performed.

The agitation and excitement of the paralytic were obvious and somewhat alarming to his nephew; though due probably rather to the weakness of his mind and his loss of self-command than to any deep affection for the daughter whose fate was at stake, or any excessive sensibility to that which might be said of himself, if after his death the truth should be revealed. Ethert was startled—not altogether unpleasantly—by the reflection that her father's state, though not

affording an excuse for the postponement of the marriage—a proposal which would probably have given a mortal blow to one so eagerly bent on its completion—might yet prove an obstacle to Ivy’s departure from home. At any rate it might hinder or abbreviate that bridal holiday for which she had scarcely been able to prepare, and which he had refused to contemplate till, just before the summons cut short their hurried discussions, her mother had referred to it.

Much disturbed by various conflicting feelings, that uppermost in his mind was certainly discontent, if not resentment. His sense of wrong—his consciousness of being forced into a sacrifice he could hardly refuse when demanded, but which no one had a right to demand from him—had been quickened by the extreme difficulty he had found in informing his mother of that which was about to take place. He had been able to state nothing beyond the bare fact; since genuine explanation was of course impossible, and any pretence thereof would only have rendered more evident to Mrs. Glynn’s keen intelligence the existence of some painful

secret. Angry with himself for a curtness which seemed not less insulting because it was inevitable, still more angry with those who had forced him to abandon the hope he had cherished against hope till the moment that finally extinguished it, it was in no bridal mood that he obeyed the summons and took his place in front of the low table which was to serve as an altar for the occasion.

But an unintentional momentary glance at the drooping figure beside him shocked and surprised him for a while out of the resentment that had grown to include if not to centre upon his bride.

Ivy had had leisure during his absence to ponder all that had passed, to remember that he had spoken no word of love, and few even of tenderness, in the critical interview ; while he had parted from her on his return to London with a haste excused only by the urgency of the legal steps to be taken at so short a notice. Yet she could not ascribe to haste that parting without the kiss, without even the caressing words and looks, which—till his unexplained estrangement—had always expressed his regret

at leaving, and comforted her ; and whose omission on each subsequent occasion had pained and perplexed her with wondering enquiries what could have caused that seemingly capricious change. Now, she could not but connect his altered manner with the mystery of which her marriage was the consequence and consummation ; feeling more and more fearful that Ethert's “ wish ” for that marriage had implied no willingness. It might well have been that he had no time to write during his brief and busy absence. He could have nothing to say ; and yet—he might, he surely would have written if

The very kindness and consideration to which her cousin had accustomed her had made her doubly sensitive to everything that could look like slight or neglect from her betrothed ; it was not like Ethert to be forgetful or careless of her feelings. She had been too shy, too timid to offer on his return the greeting she was nervously eager to receive and return. The presence of a stranger might account for the formality of his bearing ; but it so chilled her that she could hardly speak the few sentences required from her

in the brief business conversation that followed. When her hand rested on his arm she felt instinctively the absence of tenderness and sympathy in his breast; when her look furtively, tremulously sought his, and sought in vain, her dismay, her terror at the thought that she was about to give herself to a husband not merely reluctant but resentful—so resentful that all the tried affection of a lifetime was forgotten in aversion to her new claim on him—were such that her limbs almost failed to support her.

Thus, when at length, as they stood before the priest who was to bless a union that no priestly blessing could hallow, Ethert caught a glimpse of her white face and trembling form, the sight of her distress recalled suddenly and irresistibly the habitual feelings so lately interrupted, the instincts of compassion and tenderness associated all his life long with one so loving and so dependent. It was by an involuntary, almost unconscious impulse that his hand found hers, and closed with the quiet, firm, lingering clasp she remembered so well over the cold moist palm and slender icy fingers. Their touch startled him, as his clasp comforted and

encouraged her. It awakened all his natural sympathy and affection for the sister-like cousin forgotten in the unwelcome bride. He could not speak, of course; but it needed no whispered syllable of tenderness, hardly needed even the softened look she felt though she could not see it, to convey to Ivy's heart the comfort that for one instant it was his only thought to afford.

Happily, he had released her hand before the clergyman's voice reminded him once more of the hated change; and she did not feel the shudder which it needed all his presence of mind and force of will so to repress that it should not be actually visible. But she knew that the chill had come between them again. Thereafter to both the service, brief as it was, seemed terribly long; certain phrases almost appalled the bridegroom as these, and these alone, reached his inner consciousness through the strange dulness that had numbed the outer sense.

In the few words that each was required to speak, Ivy's voice was hardly lower or more tremulous than his. They had risen, she had half-consciously placed her hand on Ethert's arm,

and he was about to lead her from the room ; when, turning accidentally towards the open door near which his uncle lay, he was startled, appalled by the change that had come over the invalid's countenance.

A moment, and he had so recovered his presence of mind as to lead Ivy from the chamber without a word, and to place her still unalarmed in her mother's care, before, with a hasty "Pardon me, Ivy," he returned to the sufferer's bedside.

Lady Glynne had been too much absorbed in the ceremony, too exclusively interested in the feelings of the daughter for whom she would fain believe that it involved only a temporary trial and sacrifice, to observe any other performer or spectator of the scene. But the doctor in attendance, who had of course been present on this occasion among the very few witnesses, had been even more observant and prompter than Ethert, and the latter found him beside the patient. When at last it was possible to leave the sick-room even for a moment, drawing Ethert beyond the hearing of one whom nevertheless he believed insensible to all that passed around, the practitioner spoke :

“Another seizure: probably the last. How long he may linger I cannot yet tell; but there can, I feel sure, be no recovery, hardly a return of consciousness, certainly not of speech. Mr. Glynne, you must judge what, under the circumstances, is to be done.”

“If you are right,” Ethert replied, with much hesitation, “I can do nothing. But I presume no case could arise in which my presence could be necessary or even of comfort to him?”

“Impossible, I should say; but we shall know absolutely in a few hours.”

“Then,” said Ethert after a pause, “his wife and daughter cannot well leave him; you had better prepare them, doctor. To Lady Glynne it may be a shock, but can hardly be a surprise; and even—even my cousin must have expected it to occur before very long.”

There was something in Ethert’s tone, even more than in his words, that caused the other to turn upon him a doubtful and curious glance. He knew less of his present companion than of any other member of the family, but even Ethert he knew well. With Sir Charles and Lady Glynne he had been in constant social and professional

intercourse for the last eighteen years. He had watched Ivy from the very moment of her birth; and, aware that her brother had inherited more of physical energy than of sound health or vitality, had always looked forward with a faint conjectural interest to the possibility of some such contingency as the present.

Of late, Sir Charles' intense eagerness about the marriage, perhaps some words half-consciously let fall, had suggested to one whose long experience had been turned to account by a mind naturally quick and observant, that this was neither an ordinary love-match nor an ordinary family arrangement.

The doctor, now caught a glimpse, though of course a faint and uncertain glimpse, of the truth. Had the marriage been made under some unknown compulsion; had it, instead of binding together two hearts really or in their own real belief attached, simply deepened and embittered the estrangement of those who had been forced together against their will? If so, the task of breaking to Ivy and her mother the news of Sir Charles' critical state should not be thrown upon the unwilling bridegroom of an hour. But they

were spared occasion either for doubt or decision.

Almost before the drawing-room door had closed behind Ethert, Ivy had thrown herself at her mother's feet and, hiding her face in her lap, burst into a passion of sobs. Lady Glynne was not at first surprised or alarmed, though naturally affected; she hardly knew what to say, with what words to offer comfort or consolation in a distress natural and inevitable, a distress however whose depth and meaning she wholly failed to understand. The few words she spoke meant no more than the maternal caresses by which she sought to soothe and quiet her daughter's agitation. But after a while Ivy became instinctively aware how inaptly her mother's sympathy was directed, how little she felt the true character or apprehended the cause of the young bride's misery and dismay.

“Mamma, Mamma!” she faltered at last through her sobs. “Oh, what *have* I done?”

Still the mother gained no glimpse into the daughter's mind.

“It is very hard, darling, I know. You have been so hurried, so taken by surprise; I don't

wonder that it seems strange and terrible. But, dear, you may be sure Ethert will be patient and considerate ; he will not expect that you should be prepared, will not wonder that you shrink from the suddenness, the shock. He knows, he will feel for you ; and, darling, he will hardly press you to—shall I ask him to leave you with me till to-morrow ? You should have time to compose yourself, to recover—and he will be patient with you.”

“Mamma—oh, you misunderstand—all!—Have you seen nothing all this time ? You told me—yes, he said—he wished it ; but— Oh, I am sure now he only meant—he wished to save me. He would never have done it but for that ; he hated it, and now—he could never have treated me so, if he did not hate me for it.”

Lady Glynne, of course, knew far better than did her daughter what solid grounds might well exist for so cruel an apprehension. But on the one hand she persistently told herself that Ethert could not be so unreasonable, so hard as some words of his had suggested ; on the other, she felt sure, for better reasons, that Ivy had no rational, assignable cause for her fears ; that if

she had caught a glimpse of her bridegroom's mind, it had been by instinct, by sympathy, not through any word or act of his. The decisive interview had left the poor child fairly content and hopeful; since then the cousins had not been alone, save for the few moments of their leave-taking on the same afternoon. The mother had witnessed all that had passed between them since; and was confident that even in that brief *tête-à-tête* Ethert had said nothing, done nothing, that could not for the present be explained away. However truly Ivy might have interpreted his mood, she could have no tangible evidence of unkindness or aversion. Herself surprised by his sudden departure, the mother had caught the hurried half-articulate apology that escaped the bride's notice.

“Nonsense, child,” she answered, her troubled conscience giving to her tone a sharpness of which she was not aware. “Don't be so extravagantly foolish; don't make yourself miserable with such an impossible idea, and don't do such wrong to Ethert. What but affection for you brought him year after year to Glynnehurst, made him always so glad to come, so sorry to

leave when he thought it would hurt his mother, would look like neglect, if he stayed longer? Except her, Ivy, he has loved nothing in this world so well as you. And now, remember, he was as much taken by surprise as you were, was called on to decide quite as suddenly; and since then he has been hurried as you have not been, has scarcely had time to do all that had to be done. I am sure he has said no unkind, no unloving word to you; and if he had, surely you can forgive him if his temper were tried at such a time as this?"

"Mamma, I wish he had; but he spoke so carefully. No, he has been *kind*—it is just that—because I am a girl, and because he is sorry for me. But if he did not hate this; if he did not dislike me because he was forced to—to it, why—?"

She checked herself, partly from habit, partly from a sudden instinctive consciousness of her novel duty; a feeling that, as she had never been wont to complain of any fancied offence or provocation from one so invariably kind to her, so she was now forbidden by wifely loyalty to betray the evidences of coldness she had too distinctly felt.

But her mother had seen something of Ethert's change of manner, and guessed to what trivial but all the more significant symptoms of estrangement Ivy's memory had reverted.

“I think I know what you mean, Ivy, and perhaps I could guess ‘why’; but I cannot explain. I can only tell you that Ethert has been ill at ease, perhaps constrained with you, not for any fault of yours, and certainly not that he loved you less. Could he have given a stronger proof how much he cared for you? Would he have married, even for money, if he had disliked, nay, if he had not dearly liked you?”

“No, no!” Ivy exclaimed, the suggestion rousing her indignation, not on her own behalf, but his. “He wanted nothing of me, but it was to save—me.”

“Did not that show how much he thought of you, Ivy? He would have pitied, have taken trouble for any woman in sorrow or danger; he would have done much, no doubt, only because he is my nephew and your cousin. But would he have married any other woman to protect her from whatever peril?”

“Then, Mamma, why—you say you can guess

—why has he become strange to me, and why...? Ethert was never hasty, never inconsiderate; why should he leave me now, the instant after... unless... unless he could not bear——?”

“I don’t know why, Ivy. But did you not hear his ‘pardon me’? Something hurried him; I hope—I am afraid—”

She paused, as it flashed across her mind what might well have been the cause of Ethert’s sudden action. His abruptness had startled her almost as much as her daughter; the more that it contrasted punctilious habits of courtesy, themselves contrasting the manners with which she was more familiar. The motive whose possibility now occurred to her brought at once relief and dismay. She remembered with some sense of self-reproach that she had never thought, never observed what might be the effect of such a trial in her husband’s actual state. But Ivy’s future, Ethert’s feeling, interested her more intensely and more deeply. His long absence must mean something, and any cause was better than none. The worst, most distressing conjecture was more tolerable than the dread that resentment had rendered him for the first time indifferent to common

courtesy; that he would rather put an open and signal slight upon his bride than affect tenderness or even dissemble aversion.

With a few hardly intelligible words, rather of excuse than of explanation, she left her daughter; and fearing almost as much to find that nothing was the matter as to learn the worst, she sought her husband's chamber. On her way thither she necessarily passed through that in which Ethert and the doctor were still in consultation, and looking in the countenance of the latter, she caught at once the meaning of the composed, perhaps studied gravity it had worn as of course on so many similar occasions.

The combined effect of self-reproach, fatigue, anxiety, varied emotion long protracted, rather than the suddenness or the bitterness of the actual shock, overpowered her completely. She sank into the nearest chair and gave way to almost hysterical weeping. Ethert felt of course as helpless as men usually are in such a case. Mr. Orme, promptly rendering the little help he could, saw at once that Ivy must be summoned, that she alone could soothe or help her mother. He felt at the same time that only one person

could properly undertake the errand ; and he perhaps the last who could so perform it, so announce to the young bride the news of her approaching bereavement, as to soften the force, to lessen the pain of such a blow coming at such a moment.

“ Her daughter should be told,” he whispered aside to Ethert. “ It would be useless pain for either to see Sir Charles now. Mr. Glynne, will you bring Mrs. Glynne here, and ask her to persuade her mother to retire ?”

Ethert hesitated, as in truth he might have done under less abnormal circumstances. It was not that his uncle’s approaching death, long expected as it had been, so overwhelmed him, whether on his own account or even on Ivy’s, as to shake his composure ; but the ominous coincidence was distressing to himself, and would he felt be doubly distressing to her. To carry such tidings to a bride in the first hour of the happiest marriage would be a hard and painful task, even for one who felt the fullest power to soothe and comfort. But, despite the violence of her agitation, Lady Glynne had not for a moment lost hold of the one paramount anxiety. She was still alive

to all that bore on the possible consequences of the action she had so imperiously enforced. She discerned what was passing, guessed what might be the meaning of Ethert's reluctance; and, conscious of the painful situation for which she was responsible, roused herself for Ivy's sake to thought and self-control.

“Ethert,” she said, endeavouring to rise, “will you give me your arm? If I may go to him”

“You had better not, Lady Glynne,” said Mr. Orme gently. “If there be a change I will send for you at once, but as yet it is hardly likely; and he is quite unconscious, could not recognise you. At present it is better that both you and Mrs. Glynne should be away.”

“Then, Ethert,” said his aunt, “will you take me to my own room; and”—almost in a whisper—“you will see, you will tell Ivy, or bring her to me?”

He did not answer; and when he parted from his aunt in her boudoir she paused for a moment, still resting her hand on his arm, and looked up in his face as if she would have repeated her request. But whether it were something she read

there, rather perhaps something wanting, or whether simply silenced by that conscience which is said to make cowards of more courageous sinners, her parted lips closed again without a word, though with a deep sigh, as she turned away.

Much as he shrank from the task, painful and awkward as his next meeting with his bride must under any circumstances have been, Ethert felt that to avoid that scene, to leave to any other the duty of breaking the shock, would be not merely discourteous but unmanly; would be an unkindness, a slight as unworthy of himself as undeserved by her. Very reluctantly, knowing not how to speak, how to convey the painful tidings, or how to deal with the outbreak of grief and horror that must follow, he nevertheless dared not risk the possibility that by delay or hesitation he might allow another, perhaps a servant, to carry the news that should certainly come from his own lips. That he had been thus anticipated was his first thought when, entering the room where he had left her, he saw Ivy's slight figure thrown on a couch, her face buried in the cushions, her form unmistakably shaken by violent though in-

audible sobs. She knew his step, however, at once ; and as he approached her rose with a desperate effort at composure.

Deeply touched by a distress greater than he had expected, and reproaching himself for having, as he supposed, allowed the tidings to reach her in his absence, Ethert forgot all but the desire to make amends for the neglect ; to afford comfort, not only to natural sorrow, but to the equally natural and yet more painful horror which the close coincidence of such a calamity with such a marriage could not have failed to inspire. And as Ivy sat still, too timid or too deeply pained to volunteer any gesture of greeting, and simply unable to speak, he placed himself beside her, passing one hand round her waist and taking hers in the other. His embrace, the first for so long a time, caused a sudden and utter revulsion of feeling, seeming to revert as naturally to the intimate affection and tenderness of old as if the recent estrangement had been a mistake or a dream. Almost fancying it such—reproaching herself with unjust, unkind suspicion, yet scarcely able to feel a pang on that account amid the joy and comfort of Ethert’s renewed kindness, mindful

of nothing save the absolute unspeakable happiness of restored confidence and love—she threw the disengaged arm around his neck ; and hiding her face on his shoulder, gave way to tears once more, but to tears of relief and delight.

The meaning of those tears, of that caress, was of course lost upon Ethert. He understood only that, if the news had as he supposed reached her, the neglect which had allowed it to come through another had been unfelt or forgiven ; understood only the still unshaken, uninterrupted trust and tenderness that now as ever clung to him in trouble, that found shelter in his presence and consolation in his sympathy ; the simple faith which felt it easy to pardon, to forget his coldness—possible to believe anything except that he could be wilfully indifferent or unkind. Not for a moment did he suppose that on that account their enforced union was the less repugnant to her. He ascribed her altered mood of the moment to that which would really have been her feeling, her impulse, if she had known, as he fancied she did know, the tidings as yet undelivered ; he understood that in the sudden shock of grief

and dismay, the overwhelming distress of the moment, she had forgotten the alienation, repulsion inspired by their new relation in the life-long habits of the old, had forgotten the husband of an hour in the fraternal confidant and friend of seventeen years.

Presently, of course, the strangeness of Ethert's silence, a consciousness that his manner was rather compassionate than caressing, pitying more than loving, awakened a sense of doubt and surprise in Ivy's mind; and when she so far regained composure as to look up in his face, the mingled expression of timid affection and half-pained, half-trustful enquiry in her eyes assured Ethert that he had mistaken the nature of her feelings, the cause of her emotion.

“You have not heard?” he said; and her start of surprise and alarm at once answered his question. “Poor child! it is very painful, cruelly distressing for you at such a moment. But, after all, it was because he expected it that he was so bent—no, he is living, Ivy; but it is another stroke, and the doctor fears——”

Her tears, which had scarcely ceased to fall, were checked at once; her whitening face and

lips, the shudder that came over her whole form, the limbs that trembled even when that shudder was passed, told Ethert that the impression—of horror rather than of pain or grief—was even deeper than he had feared. He did not attempt for some minutes to speak another word of consolation, hoping that this especially painful and even alarming mood would pass; that the horror-stricken silence would be broken by a renewed outburst of the more natural and less distressing agitation he had so lately witnessed. But at last he felt it best to disturb that fixed, frozen stillness by diverting, in whatever direction, through whatever emotion, the current of her thought.

“It must have been, Ivy—would have been, in any case. I don’t think that to-day’s scene has hastened it; certainly any endeavour to put it off on his account would have been infinitely worse for him. You will have the comfort to remember that the last thing he knew was that on which his heart had been set, the one thing he cared to see accomplished while he lived. And will it not help to comfort you for your own sacrifice, that you have given him the best, the

only comfort in your power ; that as you were so good, so dutiful a child throughout, so at the last you had given the hardest, truest proof of filial love and obedience ?”

She could not answer, hardly tried to speak ; but the expression of her face, and especially her eyes, had changed completely. The fixed, almost glazed stare of horror had left them, the look into his was one of doubt, of enquiry, as if some part of his meaning perplexed her, suggested a question to which she would fain have found an answer there.

“Ivy, I hope you will not fancy—will not connect this with . . . with ourselves ; will not think there was anything strange, alarming, in the happening of two such incongruous things—at once. It was because he knew his own time was short that—the other was hurried on. I daresay it may have agitated him, but—Ivy, if you had refused, if you had even put it off . . . I may tell you now, my aunt said it would kill him.”

“Ethert ! and you did not tell me ; and I might ——”

“I could not tell you, Ivy ; and it would not

have been right. You ought not to have been coerced by any such fear."

"Oh, Ethert! but if I had And was that *your* reason? You knew *that*; and you could not, you would not dare Then I understand why; however much you hated it"

"No, indeed, Ivy. I thought of you, of my aunt; but I am afraid I never took *that* into account. No, my cousin! don't seek for reasons now; at least for mine. Be content that"—it seemed that the words would hardly come—"for no other woman would I have done—what I did from affection for you."

Once more she looked up eagerly, doubtfully, mournfully into his eyes. Their expression did not give a tenderer meaning, a warmer assurance to words that were too carefully chosen to be wholly satisfactory. If Ivy were partly comforted she was also perplexed, certainly not satisfied. Happily her sensitive conscience diverted her thought, at least her attention, from questions on which Ethert, even if he could have made up his mind to lie, would have found it hard to deceive her.

"I forgot Oh, I am grieved, ashamed, Ethert! Let me go to him."

“No, Ivy. Mr. Orme begged that neither you nor your mother would go at present. He is quite unconscious, knows nobody, can neither hear nor speak; and it would be useless pain.”

“Is not Mamma there, then? Ethert, let me go to her. I ought; she will want me.”

“You will find her in her boudoir,” Ethert said. Then recollecting himself, as Ivy rose without again looking at him, and moved towards the door; “I will take you to her. You will be summoned if there is a change. If not—I may not see you again, for I hope you will neither of you sit up—in that case, good night.”

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAFING.

AFTER another momentary interview with the doctor, heated, weary, perplexed, and excited, Ethert not unnaturally felt the craving for the fresh air of the evening, the coolness of a late twilight passing into night, that after prolonged trial of nerve and spirit is common to most of us. He had scarcely reached the Eastern terrace, whereon he had found his aunt and Ivy on his arrival with Charlie, when he encountered Mr. Brand, who by the same kind of instinct had sought the same refreshment.

“Mr. Glynne,” said the latter, with a pointed precision which grated somewhat on Ethert’s ear, reminding him of another change of address too probably near at hand—“I suppose you understand pretty correctly what must be the legal

consequences of a marriage so arranged and so hurried ?”

“You mean that there are no settlements? neither being in a position to make them without betraying the truth or recording a falsehood, even had you had time to prepare them.”

“Yes, but that is not all. We have escaped the necessity of publishing the state of the title. But in dealing with the property we have, in the interests of all, present and future—your children’s as well as your own and Mrs. Glynne’s—to bear in mind the real ownership; and I am afraid that in some form or other the truth must be recorded. Otherwise there is no existing proof of your right. Only one person besides myself is in a position to swear to the survival of the first Lady Glynne; and thirty or forty years hence, that fact forgotten or unknown, every subsisting document would go to establish Mrs. Glynne’s sole title.”

“The object of—our object to-day,” said Ethert, “was simply to secure that title, to reinstate my cousin in the position she would have enjoyed but for that—accident. Of course you will draw the settlements as for Sir Charles’s heiress.”

“ You cannot mean that literally, Mr. Glynne. That would throw away the opportunity of setting right Sir Herbert’s settlement and doing justice to future baronets.”

Ethert’s face set sternly. “ The world supposes that I marry the heiress of Glynnehurst. I know that, if I do not, it is through a legal flaw—of which I decline to take advantage. The estate must be hers for her life, and afterwards go to her heirs, or those who ought to be such. Of those I suppose I stand first ; and the title, I believe, dies with me ?”

The lawyer smiled. “ You forget, Mr. Glynne, those whom to-day’s arrangement principally contemplated. The settlements you propose would wrong yourself if you survive Mrs. Glynne, your children in the opposite event.”

Ethert’s countenance darkened still more angrily; his movement was part involuntary shudder, part gesture of impatience.

“ Never mind those who may never be. The estate is my cousin’s : I will have nothing to do with it, except as her heir.”

“ Mr. Glynne, in no case should her issue succeed until after your death. Even were she her

father's heiress, the marriage settlements would give you a life-interest."

"I decline it."

"Then, Mr. Glynne, you must employ another solicitor. As Sir Charles's adviser I could not seem to take so unfair an advantage; as the family solicitor, I cannot be responsible for an arrangement so clearly injurious to its interests."

"Very well," Ethert replied, after a pause. "I consent to succeed my cousin if... But the estate must be hers absolutely for her life, and pass to her heirs. My interest must come in only as her heir, or as a life-interest under the settlement. And the dissolution of our marriage must operate as my death would do, to leave her in sole possession. There should be nothing in the settlements to suggest the real state of the title, or give a clue to the secret."

"You must remember, Mr. Glynne, that the betrayal of that secret is always possible."

"I understand," Ethert answered, after a moment's reflection. "But for the present the same motives that have kept the accomplice silent will continue to operate. While the victim lives, I suppose we must fulfil Sir Charles's contract,

whatever it may be; on her death, he must take a much smaller bribe to hold his tongue. By the way, Mr. Brand, you say you know personally that she is living? You must take care to be informed and assured of her death."

"I have seen her," the lawyer answered, "repeatedly. Indeed, I have never made the yearly payment without ascertaining that she is alive. I know of no one else who could recognize her; and that, by the way, might create some difficulty were she to survive me. Happily that does not seem possible; her health is breaking fast. When both the parties are beyond the reach of trouble, then the man must take our terms, not we his. You must not allow yourself to be bullied by threats of publication."

"True," said Ethert; "the man's position will be very different when he can threaten only an unpleasant disclosure, a scandal, not a criminal prosecution."

They passed on into conversation still professional, but relating to details with regard to the management of the property, wherewith it is not necessary to trouble the reader. They were interrupted at last by a message from the doctor.

“Mr. Glynne,” the latter said as Ethert entered the ante-room, which, as he observed with a painful sense of incongruity, was still left as it had been arranged for the ceremony—“I must tell you that everything confirms my original impression. It is scarcely conceivable that Sir Charles should recover consciousness; it is possible, and even probable that the end may come at any moment; but should it not occur within the next few hours it is more likely to be postponed for days. It is for you to judge whether you will summon further aid from London; but I may say without hesitation that the ablest physician in England could at present tell you no more than I have told, and certainly could do nothing.”

“That last point,” said Ethert after a few moments’ consideration, “I think Lady Glynne must determine; it would be only for her comfort of mind, or her daughter’s, if anything of the kind were done. I suppose, for the few hours you mention, I ought to remain within call; but if the uncertainty may be prolonged, pray induce the ladies to retire for the night at their usual hour.”

Remaining within call, Ethert was summoned

once during the night to what the experienced practitioner thought must be the closing scene. It was not so, however. A physical vitality greater than the doctor had anticipated sustained the animal functions of life long after life in any human sense was over. Towards noon the next day, Ethert, who had fallen asleep on the sofa in the library, was awakened by Mr. Orme's entrance.

"Is there a change?" he said, springing up.

"No, Mr. Glynne. If I had supposed you were asleep I would not have disturbed you. There may be, I think will be, no change for some days: at the same time, the end might come with very short warning indeed."

"I can be of no practical use to him, I suppose," observed Ethert presently. "And if not... but of course I must be guided by the wishes of those who cannot leave a husband or father under such circumstances. Do you know if Lady Glynne has left her room?"

"She is with Sir Charles at present. Mrs. Glynne has been there, but the scene was very distressing, and uselessly distressing, to her. I hope you will persuade her not to return to the room,

unless for some brief daily visit. In truth, my patient is living only in so far that he still breathes. Mind, consciousness, even of the lowest animal kind, there is none: and will I think be none to the end."

"When my aunt is at liberty," replied Ethert, "will you ask her to give me an interview? I have slept"—he added, observing some surprise in the manner of the other, who knew that Ethert could hardly have seen his bride, save for a few minutes, since their marriage—"longer than I had any idea. I think they brought me some coffee about eight, but I remember nothing since."

Fearing for the moment again to encounter Ivy, Ethert, was content to make a partial and hasty toilet in a lavatory nearly adjoining the library. Lady Glynne's coming was delayed longer than he expected, and the delay afforded him leisure to think somewhat more composedly than he had been able to do since his marriage of the position in which that marriage and his impending accession to the title and estates had placed him. As is the case with many men of his susceptible and poetic temperament, his

thoughts flowed most freely, his inventive faculties were most alert, his imagination most active at night; but experience had taught him that he could not rely on a conclusion then reached; that the excitement which quickened the flow of fancy impaired the soundness of judgment. But one thought that had forcibly impressed itself on his imagination over-night remained equally present when he woke, refreshed and clear. Sir Charles's death, if indeed soon followed by that of his first wife, would reduce within narrow and manageable limits the danger to avert which the cousins had been hurried into so severe a sacrifice. It was in that case only with Sir Charles's successor that the holder of the secret could deal; and a secret directly affecting only the dead, and indirectly touching the heir of the title only through his wife's parents, would seem to a stranger a less powerful instrument of extortion than Ethert felt it to be. Silence might be cheaply and surely bought. The necessity for the identification of Ivy's interest with his own was involved in the fact of her illegitimacy, in the mere possibility, not the probability, of its disclosure. But if it were in his power effectually

to ensure the silence of the living witnesses, and the utter disappearance of the evidence with their death—in that case, was the marriage needed for any other purpose than as a basis for the marriage-settlement; and possibly as security against the contingency of his marriage with another? Was it needful to exact the “consideration” for the bargain which restored Ivy’s inheritance; the price of an act of justice? And if needless—would it not be wanton cruelty? On this point his whole mind was bent, as he paced the library floor while awaiting with contented patience his aunt’s arrival.

But the original objection to a formal and immediate separation seemed still insuperable. It must be known at once to the world. Sir Charles Glynne’s social and political position, the importance of Glynnehurst from every point of view that could attract public interest, were such that the fact of the marriage would be known and remembered by all the world to which he and his bride belonged; would be canvassed in every club and in half the drawing-rooms of London; would be mentioned, perhaps with more or less of surprised and curious

comment, in fifty newspapers. An instant or very speedy separation would be equally notorious, and, as he had seen at first, might well appear insulting to his bride's feelings and fatally injurious to her reputation. He was not, or believed he was not, swayed by his own desire of freedom: he had, or thought he had, given up for ever the dream he had till yesterday so fondly cherished; and hateful as must be the obligation of living with a wife he would not have chosen, had it affected himself alone, he could hardly have refused to accept it as imperative and inevitable.

But, unhappily, when his own and every other person's wishes were left out of the question, the omission hardly simplified the problem. Ivy's interests in the matter were hopelessly conflicting and not a little ambiguous—ambiguous because they depended in no small manner on the preservation of the secret. If that could be certainly, assuredly, permanently kept, then, it seemed to him, her happiness would be best consulted by a course which would allow her to look back on her marriage only as a strange nightmare, at whose crisis, as commonly happens in dreams intolerably painful or terrible, she had been

timeously awakened. Her position, thus debarred with marriage with another, would be cruel enough; but surely every woman, and especially one like Ivy, would prefer lifelong maidenhood to an unwilling, unloving marriage? But while disclosure was possible, it was possible that she might have real and bitter need of all that the security and dignity of recognised and honoured wedlock could do to protect her fame, fortune, and peace of mind. And again, the impossibility of actually consulting her greatly affected the question; what, conceded to her avowed desire, would be the consummation of kindness and considerate loyalty, might if thrust upon her be felt only as the bitterest insult and indignity.

Instinctively Ethert felt that nothing could be said to, no co-operation expected from, her mother. The terror of public scandal had been so deeply burnt into Lady Glynne's spirit, was now so completely the ruling idea of her mind, that no regard for her daughter's happiness, no appreciation of the misery of an unwilling union, would dispose her to face the comments of the world upon an arrangement that must pique its curiosity to the utmost. All that was at the moment obvious and

certain was the desirability of postponing any decisive utterance or action, so far and so long as could be done without giving needless pain to Ivy, or exciting suspicion in others. For such postponement Sir Charles Glynne's critical condition afforded a plausible—something more than plausible—opportunity. It would surely be possible to assume the necessity of Ivy's presence at home in such a manner as not to hurt her; and his own absence would seem, except perhaps to her, a natural consequence.

Yet Ethert sorely feared that such a separation, however welcome in itself—much more any attempt to prolong it, however represented—would be felt by one so sensitive as Ivy as an unkindness, a slight, if not an indignity. He understood her well enough to know that, however reluctantly she might have assented to the marriage, her assent must have been sincerely and loyally given; that she could have entertained no other idea than that of fulfilling her duty, of accepting her position as his wife with absolute truth, in undoubting, unbounded faith. All that might seem to impair its reality, to weaken the obligation in more critical eyes, would only deepen her sense of the

duty she had undertaken ; render her more watchful, more anxious to fulfil every other spoken and implied promise to the uttermost, if she were consciously unable to give the love she had pledged. Her sweet submissive temper made the prospect tenfold more intolerable. If only she would resent what she had good right to quarrel with !—but to meet the wistful look in those soft tearful eyes, to refuse an answer to her questions, spoken or unspoken, why she should be so hardly treated, what offence she could have given ; to see her turn away almost heartbroken to spare him the sight of the anguish she could no longer restrain—he felt that, if such should be the nature of her appeal to the heart which, however hard to her present claims, could never shake off the hold she had acquired in the past, he could hardly trust his own resolve or consistency. His perplexity as regarded both the immediate and the ultimate future grew deeper moment by moment ; and, embarrassing as threatened to be his interview with his aunt, her approach was a welcome interruption to his own thoughts.

Lady Glynn had evidently been weeping, but not as it would seem with the violent over-

whelming sorrow of a cruel and intolerable bereavement; rather her tears seemed to have been a relief—an observer less kindly, more critical than Ethert, might have thought them, as feminine tears sometimes are, almost as mere a matter of course as the outward signs of mourning. It was with quite as much composure as he could command that she answered his usual greeting. A few sentences, of course, a few words of enquiry and of compassion, had passed between them before; finding that she would not assist him, Ethert entered on a subject that might, had she so chosen, have been less awkward for her than for himself.

“While . . . while this—suspense lasts, Aunt, I take it for granted that Ivy will not, cannot well leave you, or rather my uncle. It seems certain that he will hardly be able to recognize any of us again: but nevertheless she could not be willing. . . . I understand from Mr. Orme that you do not wish to send for Sir B. C—, or I would telegraph at once; or if you prefer it I would see him in London, and if he thinks there can be a doubt would return with him.”

“You don’t mean that you would leave us, Ethert?”

“Of course, Aunt, if I could be of service, or if my presence could be of the slightest use or comfort to my uncle, I should not dream of leaving him or you. It is true I am much wanted at the office. My absence is so inconvenient to my chief, whose consideration for me binds me to consider him, that no mere formal propriety should keep me long from my post. But, after all, I expected and told him that it might be impossible for me to return for some three or four weeks. After that I am pledged to resume my duties. On the other hand, I have felt so much at home here, and you have been so kind to me, that under other circumstances I might fancy myself a comfort to you ; and if so”—her gesture left no doubt on this point—“if so, I would not have left you. But, as things are, Ivy’s position must be our first consideration ; and to have her to yourself for the present, with no other claim on her attention, would surely be best for both of you.”

“I don’t think so, Ethert, and I am very sure that Ivy will not feel it so. You cannot

think that she would wish you to leave her now."

"I know she would never say so, and perhaps she might not be aware of it. But I think, on reflection, you will agree with me that while her father's state continues, while the idea of leaving home would be shocking and cruel—I could not name it, and I am sure you would not—it is best that my presence should be dispensed with. The change in our relations will come far more naturally and easily if it be as little as possible obtruded on her now; if it take place much in the same manner as it would have done in ordinary circumstances I mean, of course, when you can spare her, and when there is no conflict of ties and duties."

There was a certain undeniable common sense in what Ethert said; still more force in what he obviously forbore to say. This Lady Glynne could not refuse to recognize; and yet she felt that neither what was uttered nor what was implied expressed the speaker's real thought. Had he loved his bride, had he believed in her wife-like love, he was the last man to have dwelt on such considerations. He would have forgotten

utterly the formal in recollection of the natural tie between them. He could not have wished to leave Ivy in the midst of her distress and loneliness, in mourning for a brother, in daily expectation of a father's death ; his last thought would have been that his absence at such a moment could be a relief to her.

"But, Ethert, all is utterly uncertain. If you went to-morrow morning, you might be recalled before night. Surely—and Ivy will feel your going very keenly, however it might be explained. Wait ; at any rate take no decision to-day, and see and soothe her. It hurt her not to see you again last night ; and till she knew that you had been up so long and were asleep, I saw she wondered and fretted over your absence this morning."

"I am very sorry," Ethert answered earnestly, "if I have really grieved or hurt her. But—Aunt, I must leave you to explain, but . . . if I blunder or forget she must—I am sure she will—believe that it is blundering, forgetting, and no indifference, no disregard of her. But misconception is so easy, and as things stand must give so much pain, make so much

mischief, that I cannot but wish myself elsewhere."

Ethert's arguments were such as it was equally impossible to dispute in words and to accept at heart. The mother could no more demur to his plausible assumption than avow the secret misgivings inspired by his evident anxiety to depart. In truth, both knew well that neither was or could be thoroughly sincere. In their reference to Sir Charles's state there was and must be a certain decorous exaggeration, of which Ethert, perhaps unconsciously, was taking advantage. Ivy's father had not so interwoven his own life with that of his children, had not been so much to them, or perhaps even to their mother, that no other and happier thought could really enter their minds, that no other and stronger influence could sway their feelings, while he lingered between life and death. But this truth, known to both, could be avowed by neither; nay, both felt compelled perforce to assume the contrary.

"At any rate, Ethert, you must not think, you will not speak of going to-day; and you will see Ivy, you will talk to and comfort her, after I

have said the little you seem to wish me to say to her?"

"I will see her, of course," Ethert replied, in a tone however that conveyed more of shrinking from the proposed interview than he at all intended. "But don't send her to me—don't let her send for me, directly and formally."

"Send for you?" Lady Glynne rejoined. "Ethert, is that like Ivy? I have only to tell her where you are, to let her see that she will not be unwelcome, and you know that she will come to you at once."

"As you please," he answered; as the servant brought in the breakfast which both he and his hostess had forgotten, but of which Ivy's natural consideration had thought, even while her mind dwelt so painfully on her father's state, so anxiously, wonderingly on Ethert's apparent neglect. "I had rather, if you can help it, she should not come to me here. I shall be in the garden half-an-hour hence: let us meet naturally, and if possible accidentally. You might well urge her not to let the day pass without the relief to health and spirits that fresh air will give."

With her hand on the door-handle, Lady Glynne, under a sudden impulse of maternal misgiving, turned and spoke—quickly, though in a faltering and timid voice :

“But you will be kind to her, Ethert? Remember—it is a hard position ; it would have been too hard, too cruel, but for her simple trust in her cousin’s kindness. She had learnt to expect nothing but tenderness and indulgence from you ; you will remember that? She is not to blame.”

The interposition, however natural, was most injudicious and untimely. Ethert, though embarrassed and perhaps vexed with himself, was not conscious of irritation or ill-will, and only wished to show Ivy all the kindness, and even tenderness, that consistency would permit, that might not mislead her or misinterpret his feeling. But his aunt’s plea angered him, galled him, none the less that it was so obviously just. It implied a distrust the more exasperating that it was not quite unreasonable ; and it came from one whose right to ask more than she had already exacted he was not disposed to admit. In truth, the more acutely he felt the injustice of resentment

towards Ivy, the more his suppressed impatience was directed against her who now appealed to him on Ivy's behalf.

"She is not to blame," he answered curtly, "and it is hard on both. But if you have kept faith with me"—looking keenly and suddenly into a countenance that manifestly changed under his glance—"Ivy will expect no sentiment, no professions from me. Aunt Caroline—you know what passed between ourselves; you, and only you, know how Ivy was brought to consent. If she were half as bitterly conscious as I of coercion, compulsion—if you forced her will as mine was forced—God forgive you, for I never can."

The lady was this time less at a loss than before, and there was plausibility, if not truth, in the retort which might well have been prompted by genuine womanly resentment.

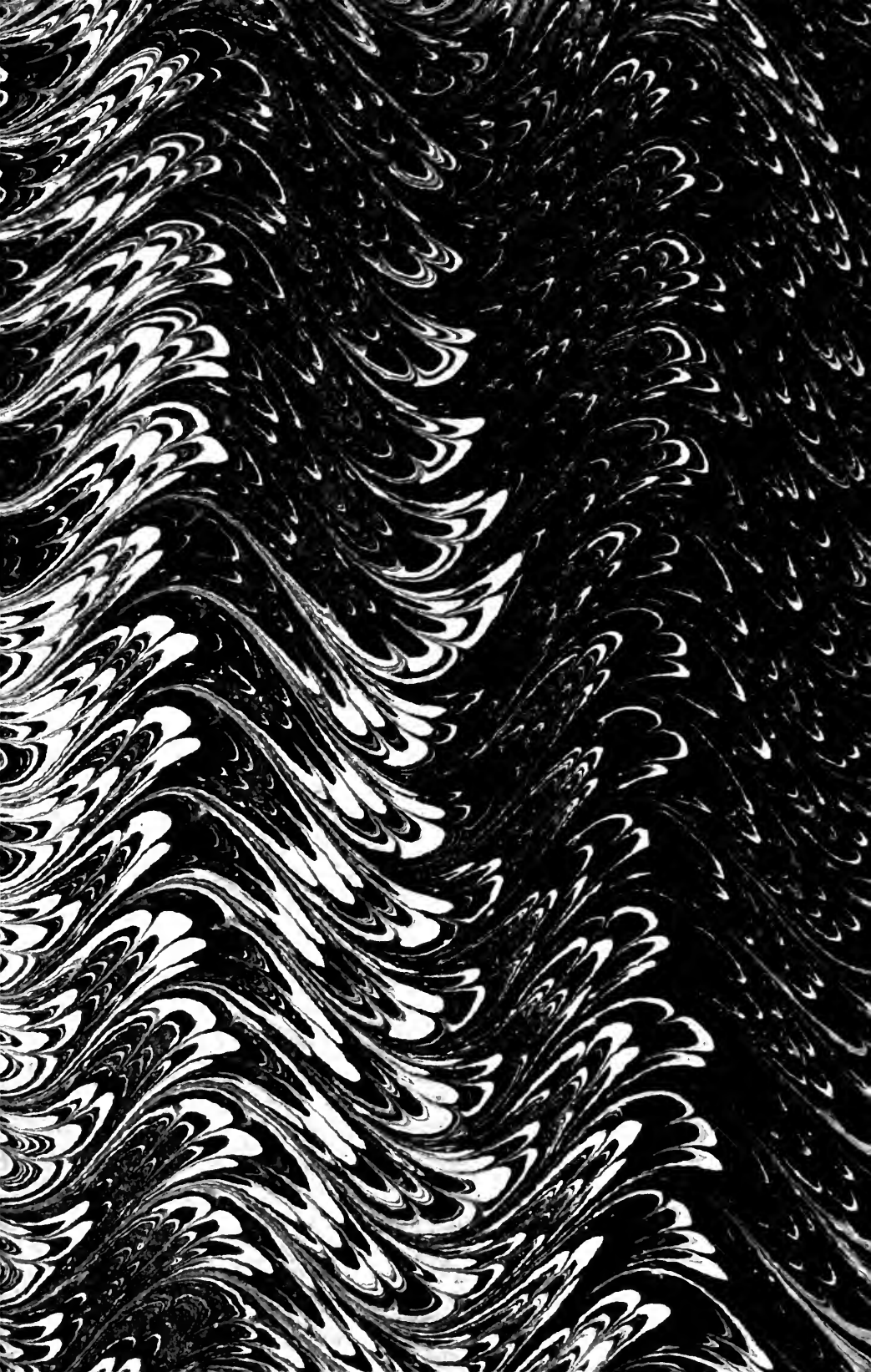
"Do you not see how unkind is your implied question, what a dilemma you would force on me? Ethert, what would you have me say? Am I to tell you that your wife would not have married you if she could have refused; or would you have

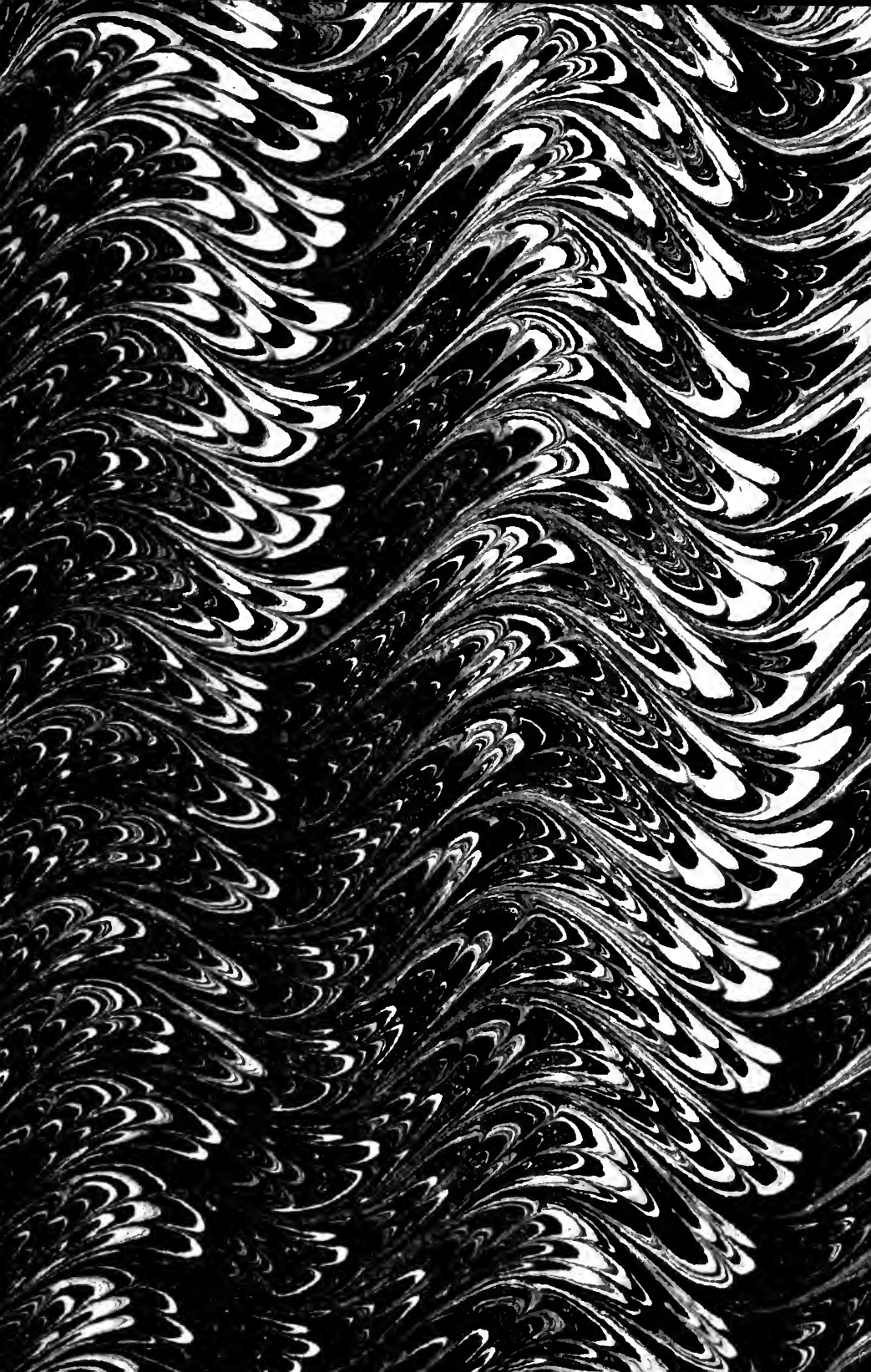
her mother say that she was more willing than yourself?"

This was unanswerable; and Lady Glynne quitted the room with the feminine satisfaction of feeling that she had enjoyed the last word,—and left its sting behind.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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